Claiming the City
Civil Society
Mobilisation by the Urban Poor

Edited by Heidi Moksnes and Mia Melin
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The Cuttac Ring Road resettlement project

Anna Vindelman

Architects Without Borders (ASF-Sweden) is an organisation without political party or religious affiliation, working for a sustainable, equal and fair housing development all over the world. It is the Swedish branch of the international organisation Architecture Sans Frontières (ASF). Together, we comprise eighteen member organisations in four continents, standing behind the joint programme, the Hasselt Charter. ASF-Sweden was formed in 2006.

ASF wishes to support a long-term sustainable development of the human-built environment, where the people most in need are made central. It works within four areas of priority:

* Disaster and conflict management* – re-building after natural disasters, as well as with restoration and site development;
* Overpopulation and urbanisation* – support from architects and planners in slum up-grading and issues about land usage;
* Hands-on projects* – concrete and functional projects that quickly may better people’s living conditions;
* Development and dissemination of knowledge as well as lobbying* – presentations, seminars, education, exhibitions, actions etc.

**ASF-Sweden and SPARC**

Since 2008, Architects Without Borders-Sweden collaborates with the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres, SPARC-India. SPARC works in alliance with two community-based organisations (Mahila Milan and the National Slum Dwellers Federation) in order to find solutions for affordable housing, secure tenure and sanitation for the urban poor. The aim of the collaboration is for members of both

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organisations to gain knowledge and experience by working together in ongoing projects.

More specifically, for ASF-Sweden the aim is to learn how to practically apply enabling housing and urban design strategies, and to creatively work out alternative models for affordable spatial and physical solutions together with SPARC and local professionals. The learning processes are to be shared locally through workshops and seminars at both ends, involving students, professionals and civil society.

For SPARC, the aim is to profit from ASF-Sweden’s skills and knowledge with respect to sustainable and socially responsible design and planning, as well as from its international network, which includes academic institutions, professionals and non-governmental organisations working on development aspects of the built environment. SPARC also hopes that the collaboration will familiarise students, professionals and civil society from abroad with the local Indian context and learn how to work effectively with the urban poor.

Since 2010, ASF-Sweden has been involved in a number of different slum upgrading projects in India, especially in Odisha, together with the Urban and Development Resource Centre (UDRC), an allied partner to SPARC. In these projects, Swedish architects and planners have, among other things, been able to contribute in the work with plans for area layout, house drawings and methods for participatory planning. ASF-Sweden has also linked up a number of master students from universities in Sweden with SPARC. As a result of this, a number of field studies linked to some of SPARC’s projects have been carried out since 2009.

An important part of the collaboration is for knowledge and experience gained by visiting students and professionals to be shared, accumulated and institutionalised within ASF-Sweden. Therefore, the ambition is that all work will be presented and documented by and for both ASF and SPARC in order to develop the collaboration.

**The Cuttack Ring Road resettlement project**

The slums along the Ring Road in the city of Cuttack in the North-Eastern state of Odisha are frequently hit by floods. They are situated in water-logged areas or by the river-bed and therefore flooded every monsoon.
The Cuttac Ring Road resettlement project

After seven years of discussions, the municipality has finally provided land so that 14 informal settlements with a total of approximately 5,000 inhabitants may move to a new area inside the town. Helena Ohlsson and I (Anna Vindelman), both urban planners from ASF-S, have, together with the people in the areas, SPARC and UDRC, participated in the planning of the new area.

As a basis for the planning, an inventory and an analysis of existing conditions were carried out and plan components were developed. The inventory and analysis were important, not just to find out how many people are living in the settlements etc, but also to identify and understand the existing qualities of the settlements, so that these qualities could be designed and implemented in the new area. The inventory, the analysis and the plan components were jointly carried out by the women’s federation Mahila Milan, UDRC, SPARC and ASF-Sweden.

The base of the inventory was a socio-economic survey, hand-drawn maps and GPS-mapping of the areas. For the analysis, the data was compiled and complemented with field visits, interviews and dialogues with community leaders and people living in the areas. The settlements were also documented through photographs and measurements of houses and outdoor spaces etc.

One important finding of the analysis was not only the great use, but also the great importance of so-called semi-private and semi-public spaces. A space used for private purposes, where you also interact with close neighbours — such as a veranda — is called semi-private, whereas the semi-public space is a space shared between a limited number of households; it is a place where one interacts with or meets neighbours, such as a shared courtyard, a space with a shared water tap, or outside a limited group of houses. All such places have the multi-purpose of serving both as a place for domestic work and a place to meet friends. They are therefore of major importance to social life in these areas. The analysis showed that they were especially important to the women who more seldom left the vicinity. In slum upgrading and slum re-development, focus is often on houses, whereas the space in-between the houses is neglected. Thus, in this project we tried to point to the importance and design of these spaces.
The plan components that were developed included recommendations for:

- plan structure,
- livelihood,
- architecture,
- environmental aspects,
- social aspects,
- maintenance and
- process.

ASF-Sweden has presented and handed over its work to Mahila Milan, the UDRC, SPARC and local architects that are to continue the work. ASF-S has plans for a return visit to the project in the spring of 2014, in order to follow up and evaluate the joint work, learn from the evaluation, and hopefully contribute to the continuation of the project.

Author affiliation
Architects Without Borders-Sweden