

**Removing Unfreedoms  
July 7<sup>th</sup> Colloquium  
London School of Economics**

**Comments on the Film and Introduction to Jockin**

**Speaker: Michael Mutter**

The approach that we have shown in the film will go to a very wide audience. Janet, I think you plans to make two hands on films from that material and that will be shown on BBC world television with a viewing audience of 234 million house holds worldwide. So that's spreading the word with the process.

But what we've got with Amartya Sen's approach as Romi has been saying, is an interaction between the individual and society. And I think already buried in that film are a hundred further stories. For example, Laxmi's son who you saw alongside her, in her house, he grew up in that environment with the pavement dwellers in Mumbai but with the activities of the Mahila Malan to provide as support, the son was able to go to further education, right through his education and was able to study for a bachelors graduate degree at the moment. So it just shows how within the process individuals are also brought into the picture of development. But quite how that happens I think is what we want to explore.

I very much welcome a perspective from both Jockin and Sheila on how they feel that our discussions in Mumbai when we came with Sen's ideas and we then looked at how they were working on the ground. You have heard Jane's review of what we discussed at the time. So now I think it would be good to have a perspective from the slum dwellers themselves so Jockin and then Sheila will continue.

## **National Slum Dwellers Federation**

**Speaker: Jockin**

We have seen what we are trying to do here in Mumbai and working in other 50 cities of India. When we started out we thought most of the time in 1985, there was a Supreme Court judgment, which said very clearly that no pavement dweller should be given any alternative and they should be thrown out. And everybody on the street including the Ruling party and Members of Parliament were taking people around telling them just to demonstrate. That is where we decided to think about collecting all the woman and try to find out what are the answers for the demolitions. The Government is saying that this is not your land and then Government is saying your lazy and the Government is saying your are not credit worthy and they are saying no person will help you. That is why we called all these people together.

First we said, "start saving". And somehow in our federation we all came together and thought what are the things very important? And what are the changes in the system and how this could be born? Who will bring the change? Then we said there are three major ingredients, in order to change, a new way of looking at it. We thought **money, information and communication**. Who has these three things? And naturally that's what we call in the poor- the woman has money. Who has the information? You can catch any woman in the street and ask her, she will tell you exactly how many children, who is pregnant, who is going to deliver tomorrow, who is sleeping with whom, who had affair with whom, what everything, the complete information will be out. I don't need any dictionary or library or any encyclopedia. I don't know what all these books will give but here the woman can give every information just instantly that is local. I said you just shake the woman and money will fall automatically. That is what is our situation in India.

The third one was who is best at communication? Giving a chance to our women, out of 24 hours a day they will speak 30 hours a day. And they are also so clever and so articulate so these are the three so we handover leadership to them. Today, this is what we have done what we have done after this three and that is collective. As an individual person there is different way. You go there, you want your loan you just take it (loan), no paperwork no documentation, nothing, just go there ask for the money and take the money and that is unlimited. After that you want to go for something else then there is paperwork. Then you have to other things. This way we established it started and slowly people are able to have complete power.

Earlier, every other day there is eviction, there will be police and municipality will come to demolish the house. In the evening build the house. And in the next morning demolish and then build again! But that thing got changed as people are now able to stand and tell the police and municipality and say, "**Here is the Savings**, stop your eviction, we are making our money ready in order to go and live at another place!" And that is the story of how our community has started and it is going from one community to another.

Like that, today, the whole of Bombay out of about 6.7 million people we are in direct working with more than 40% of the people of Bombay. That is how this whole thing has slowly moved from one settlement to another settlement and then we directly deal with municipality. I am very happy and proud to say one of the government officers with whom we have to deal. If you ask him 20 years ago I would not have seen his office, but it would have closed. But today he is sitting with us, with whom women can sit and have a dialogue and tell them what they want. These are the women, who can sit with the finance minister or any planning officer and sit and talk to them, what is the thing we want, how we want to change.

In fact, in this what we are telling everyone, no more the poor is a *beggar*. We are the main agents of society. It is the not the other sections of the society which always say we are going to change society. No, it is the poor who are going to change the complete lookout of Bombay, India, not even talking about India even others

(cities). Because the community has taken development in its own control:

“What you do you want to live, what kind of house you want, what kind of lifestyle you want, what kind of education you want for your children, what kind of environment do you want to live? Where is land?”

In 1985 – 1986, when Government said there is no land in the city, within 15 days time, these women living on the street were able to identify 70,000 hectares of vacant land available in the city of Bombay itself. And that was Government land. We were able to identify it and completely all of us 90% of these people were illiterate, uneducated.

The **Saving System** is designed by the community themselves and how these uneducated people can manage this money? But we managed it. Today we are talking about how many million, how many thousand, everyday more than 3-5 million rupees is given as loan and collected back everyday. This is not money collection, what we are trying to do is collecting people and putting the issue of their own and discussing what to do about it. Not expecting anybody to do the development.

We are trying to say we will do our own development, not expecting anyone to come and do our development. We will improve ourselves. We will find out. That is where you see in relocation site you can see. 11,000-12,000 families have moved to resettlement. Now we are planning to go to Government, City Alliance for planning and talk about sanitation. It is not for a block; it is for whole city toilet block. We are talking about. In the city of Pune, we talked to them, the corporation was hardly spending 100,000 Rs. a year. For twenty years. After we went for dialogue, in 1 year Government spent 40 crore in 3 years time. Complete city of Pune, today the only city in India, which has 85% people covered and having toilet. This is what the Federation does. So this is what we have done.

Now today we are talking about city of Bombay and the government and other politicians talking about and all say these people can't do

anything. And we are talking about the complete rehabilitation of Bombay pavement dwellers in a short period of time. But when we do like this, then we get outside evaluators, I don't know from where they come. I think they will ask how we have done our toilets. How do we use it how do we sit? This is how somebody comes. They will want to evaluate and ask for documents. We don't have any. Starting from me and down everybody is illiterate. This Federation is purely of slum dwellers, no any outsiders.

That is why we have support of SPARC, and the third is Mahila Milan. I always say that we have to have 3-pin plug. 2 give a small current, for a small fan. But for a fridge or computer you need 3. Government always will say you go there, there. We can say go there; go there as we are three. First is Mahila Malan, second is Slum Dwellers Federation and third is Sparc. If we have these beautiful people with us the government will not throw us out. We can express whatever we want to express. I will talk crap and bull shit, but Sheila will talk very nicely. This is what Government understands. My language they don't understand because I am talking about nonsense, it is not written in any books, in your theory in your college.

But Sheila will exactly translate my thinking. And Celine will shout out, like now—"Jockin speak slowly!" Their, (Sparc's) job is to--I always say Sparc is my washing machine. We (slum dwellers) always get everything, get money, ideas everything. And we just mess it up. In the evening this washing machine does everything. In the morning we get it back. So this is what we are trying to say, the poor is not mere recipient, the poor is the real change agent of society.

### **Michael Mutter**

I think we always have tremendous hope when Jockin speaks because, you've always got a very direct way of explaining the reality on the ground, I mean its very simple and straightforward, well it appears that way, I know its not and I know that you have a lot of personal interaction not only with the collective group but also with the individuals and solving individuals problems is another aspect of the, of your work and of the people doing the collection process. So it strikes me that you've got a series of processes that are interacting.

Now we come to Sheila (Sheela says the washing machine), in your most beautiful language I think its still this exploration between individuals how the collective represents the individuals and does the battles on behalf of the group.