

IMPROVING LIFE IN SHANTIES/SLUMS - HENAMULLA

The present study concerns itself with the life of women in the slum area of the metropolitan city of Colombo, Sri Lanka.

AN OVERVIEW OF SLUMS/SHANTIES*, COLOMBO

The administrative district of Colombo contains nearly half of the total urban population in the country. This population is concentrated in the centre and in the suburban areas within a radius of fifteen miles within the Colombo Metropolitan area.

The nature of the problems in the Metropolitan area of Colombo is typical of any post-colonial city. As the centre of distribution of exports and imports and as the hub of administration from colonial times, Colombo has grown to be the single dominant metropolis in the country. Colombo has grown in importance because it is a port around which the country's import and export activities are centred.

The growth of slums and shanties in the city have today assumed alarming proportions, as in many cities of the developing world. The following table indicates the large share occupied by slum and shanty dwellers.

TABLE 1

Dwelling Units

	<i>No. of units</i>	<i>No. of families</i>	<i>Average no. of families per unit</i>	<i>No. of people per unit</i>	<i>Average family size</i>
Slums	17,253	23,137	1.34	8.04	6
Shanties	15,951	19,608	1.23	7.37	6
Total slums/ shanties	33,204	42,745	1.28	7.72	6

Source: UDA (Urban Development Authority) Policy Paper

**Slums:* Old tenements or large old residences in the commercial industrial areas of the city, which have deteriorated due to neglect, overcrowding, poor sanitary conditions.

Shanties: Structures of non-durable materials, like wooden planks, zinc sheets or cadjans, built mainly by squatters on private, government or municipal land, often subject to inundation by floods.

Population

<i>Total in the city</i>	<i>Pre-school population under 5 years Total (approx.)%</i>	<i>Population in slums</i>	<i>Population in shanties</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
613,018	52,000 8.5	138,822	117,648	256,470	41.5

Source: 1978 mid-year estimates and UDA Policy Paper

It is to be noted that slum/shanty dwellers form approximately 42 per cent of the population in the city. The growth of the shanty units and the population has been extremely rapid - from 1347 shanties in 1953 to 33,204 in 1979. Other than the normal problems of overpopulation in a city, the inhuman living conditions among the slum dwellers became a source of great concern to the government as well as to non-government social organisations.

In June 1979 a Project Committee representing the Women's Bureau, the Ministry of Local Government, Colombo Municipal Council, the Common Amenities Board, the Urban Development Authority (UDA), the Sri Lanka Women's Conference, the Department of Small Industries, the Public Assistance Department and UNICEF selected four slum areas for initiating slum improvement work.

TABLE 2

Project Areas Selected

<i>Areas</i>	<i>Housing units</i>	<i>Number of families</i>	<i>Total population (approx.)</i>	<i>Ethnic/religious composition</i>	
Henamulla	590	655	3630	Sinhalese/Buddhist Moor and Malay/ Muslim Tamil/Hindu	45% 42% 13%
Aluthkade	286	480	2900	Muslim majority	
Baseline Avenue, Borella	146	197	1200	Sinhalese/Buddhist majority	
Wellawatte Canal Bank	57	63	380	No exact data available	

On an experimental basis the first Project activities were started at Henamulla.

HENAMULLA

Henamulla Camp is one of the most congested and crowded shanty settlements in the north of the city. In an area of ten acres there are 655 family units with 3630 people living in 590 shanties made with wooden planks, cadjan and corrugated sheets. A few houses are made of wattle and daub with mud floors. The people live in an environment of squalor, hunger and hopelessness under conditions of deprivation and poverty.

The first settlers in the Henamulla Camp came in August 1948. That year the low-lying areas around Grandpase, Maligawatte and Sedawatte were flooded owing to heavy rains and the overflowing of the banks of the Kelani River. Following an epidemic of smallpox the families were immediately evacuated by the Colombo Municipality and were temporarily housed in the two camp buildings at Henamulla abandoned by the British military authorities. By mid-1950 other families from flood affected areas, and those evicted by the Colombo Municipal Corporation (CMC) under the slum and shanty clearance programme in the city, had come to reside in this camp area.

In order to get a better view of the conditions prevailing in Henamulla at the preparatory stage of the programme, a social-economic survey was conducted both by the UDA and the Women's Bureau assisted by UNICEF - the latter conducted by the women of the locality itself.

The community surveys conducted highlighted several issues, particularly the need to:

1. create community awareness among the people and thereby bring about community cohesiveness among various racial and religious groups;
2. involve the dwellers in the process of community self-development, giving due consideration to the people's hopes and aspirations;
3. develop community leadership so as to ensure the participation of the people in planning, implementation and continuity of various community development programmes and activities;
4. develop income-generating skills amongst women in order to improve family life.

Immediate attention therefore had to be focused on the improvement of:

1. environment - including housing and sanitation;
2. employment and economic uplift;
3. education - general and vocational;
4. health and family life;
5. recreation and welfare.

Environment, including Housing and Sanitation

The majority of the dwellers felt insecure as they had no tenure or ownership of the land where they had already built their houses. As a result they had no inclination to improve the condition of existing houses, sanitation, water and drainage facilities, street lighting, speedy disposal of refuse, etc. Immediate steps were needed to provide security which would motivate them to improve the prevailing conditions.

Employment and Economic Uplift

More than a quarter of the dwellers had no regular income and one fifth had practically no income at all. The average household income was approximately

Rs. 140 per month. The women had no marketable skills whereby they could significantly contribute towards the household budget. It was, therefore, considered necessary to introduce short-term vocational training courses for women to generate employment opportunities and thereby help them to raise household incomes.

In the first instance, existing self-employment ventures could be encouraged, e.g. making paper bags, sewing clothes, *biddi* manufacturing, making of household utensils etc. Later organisational assistance could be planned in respect of various cottage activities, like paper making, *papadam* making, manufacturing metal buckets, etc.

Education, General and Vocational

Although literacy *per se* (compared to other developing countries) was high, in actual fact most women and children could barely write their names and could decipher the alphabets only with difficulty. Nearly 40 per cent of the children of school-going age had dropped out of school, mainly for economic reasons such as the lack of school books, clothes and the necessity to eke out an existence by doing odd jobs.

The women by and large lacked an awareness of the general aspects of life. Besides, they lacked vocational skills whereby some income could be generated. It was therefore necessary to provide certain vocational skills to the women, as well as to motivate them to improve their living conditions.

With regard to the children, it was felt necessary to have some provision of school books, clothes, etc. for those in need. This could be made possible through the assistance schemes of the CMC and the voluntary social work agencies. To overcome problems of admission, necessary steps would have to be taken so that the schools in the area could temporarily suspend, where appropriate, certain rules, e.g. submission of birth certificates and payment of facilities' fees before admission.

Health and Family

Child and Family Welfare Centre

Considering that infant mortality in large shanty areas was 53.1 per hundred births (1976) and 46.7 in small shanties, it was obvious that children were lacking the desirable care. The large family sizes were evidently an indication of absence of family life education. The establishment of a Child and Family Welfare Centre at Henamulla was considered therefore as a prerequisite for the social development of the area. The establishment of such a centre envisaged the opening of a Day Care Centre for pre-school children of working parents, which would be established under the auspices of a non-government social work agency. The Department of Probation and Child Care Services would assist such a centre by way of per capita maintenance grants towards the children cared for, and also by way of *ad hoc* grants towards the upkeep of buildings and the purchase of equipment, furniture etc.

The Child and Family Welfare Centre would be established using the resources of the Day Care Centre. The project envisaged the development of programmes in this centre to reach the family through the child. This would involve a readjustment of the use of the existing organisational structure (building, land, personnel etc.) of the Day Care Centre by extension of existing services benefiting the child and the family. These services would include family planning and provide increasing opportunities to people around the Day Care Centre for a better life.

Some of the services that would be provided at these centres would be:

maternal and child welfare,
family planning and family counselling,
health education,
adult education,
milk feeding,
nutrition education,
vocational guidance and training,
outdoor and indoor sports activities.

Community Health Programme

Poor sanitary conditions - use of bucket latrines, absence of sewage, no pipe-borne water, swampy pools on roads and house sites - all pointed towards the need for an intensified Community Health Programme. This programme would utilise the services and personnel of the CMC, the government and voluntary social work agencies.

Recreation and Welfare

Because the community lacked any form of recreation or welfare facilities, need for a community hall was immediate. This would serve partly as a reading room, and also provide space for indoor recreation and youth welfare work, thereby becoming the focal point of communal activity.

Recognising that the main activities in the area during recreation time were gambling and drinking alcohol (both leading to law and order problems), it was felt necessary to launch an intensive programme highlighting the evils of these addictions.

Although the needs of the community had been identified, work in all areas could not be started at once. In June 1979, the Red Cross Association started a weekly milk distribution service for children. This service was however temporarily discontinued because of certain transport difficulties and problems related to milk preparation. In early 1980, a programme of physical upgrading sponsored by the Dutch Government was planned. Initially, amenities and infrastructure were to be provided for the whole community and a number of "core houses" were to be built on vacant land for families who could afford a rent of around Rs. 25 per month.

Two other non-governmental organisations which had been operating even earlier at Henamulla initiated welfare programmes. In 1980 Sarvodaya, in cooperation with four unemployed women from Henamulla, planned a pre-school centre for 40 children; whilst a Buddhist group initiated a Sunday school for some 250 children. Later in the year, the Probation and Child Care Department decided to start a Day Care Centre for some 30 children.

In order to make the slum dwellers active partners in community development programmes, a city-based non-governmental organisation panel was formed. This panel was encouraged to meet monthly and discuss ways and means of supplementing the planned activities.

In 1981, at the time of the visit to the slum area, several agencies, governmental and non-governmental were operating (some directly whilst others indirectly). In the main, the work entrusted to them was:

Colombo Municipality	Family Health Training (previously done by the Family Planning Association)
Common Amenities Board	Toilet and water improvement
Sri Lanka Women's Bureau (in collaboration with UNICEF)	Vocational training for women

Charity Commissioner's
Department

Monetary help to community

Urban Development Authority

Physical upgrading

Whereas the UDA received financial aid from the Dutch Government, the Colombo Municipality and Women's Bureau were financially backed by the Government of Sri Lanka (the latter also being assisted by UNICEF). Both the UNDP and the World Bank also committed themselves to financial assistance for a period of two years.

TRAINING IN INCOME-GENERATING SKILLS AMONG WOMEN IN HENAMULLA

In deference to the Government's aim to improve the living standards of the low-income groups, an integrated project was launched to serve the low-income sector in the slums and shanties of the Henamulla area in Colombo City.

UNICEF's direct involvement in this project commenced in 1979 when it assisted the Common Amenities Board (CAB) in providing basic common amenities such as latrines, bathrooms and standpipes to the tenement and shanty gardens in Colombo. Since then, the CAB has signed a protocol with UNICEF for the provision of nearly \$ 520,000 to provide amenities to these marginal groups.

Other than UNICEF, three major government agencies were involved in this project. In addition to the CAB, which was to handle a major component of physical upgrading of the sector, the Colombo Municipal Council and Women's Bureau undertook the task of organising these communities and providing them with health education and services along with training in skills which would provide employment opportunities for women. The project administration was done in close collaboration with the Urban Development Authority.

The focus of attention in the case of the Women's Bureau was the unskilled women of the locality. It took upon itself the task of:

1. training women in selected productive skills such as book-binding, coir-rope production, bakery and *papadam* making;
2. providing information on the basic techniques to better family living in the sphere of hygiene and sanitation, child care, family health and family planning, budgeting of household consumption and savings;
3. providing leadership in women for the development and sustaining of community activities for self-reliance;
4. training the programme staff in sociological and community development skills;
5. training the staff in all subject matters related to project activities, i.e. economics of small-scale enterprises, methods and techniques of training and extension, and programme planning and management.

A working committee to implement the work of the project was appointed, representing the Ministry of Local Government, the Department of Small Industries, the Common Amenities Board, the Sri Lanka Women's Conference, UNICEF and the Women's Bureau. This committee was expected to meet regularly and help in monitoring the programme. Representatives of the Women's Bureau on their part also attended the monthly City Community Development Council meetings held by the Colombo Municipality to coordinate the UNICEF-assisted project in Colombo.

A Project Adviser of UNICEF was associated at the initial stage of the project on a short assignment. Today a Project Officer who is paid by UNICEF on a monthly basis has been appointed to follow up the project work. That person helps to organise training programmes for women, coordinate with existing institutions which are related to project activities, follow up and implement project proposals, and regularly evaluate and monitor the projects.

Development of the Project

In September 1979, all women above fifteen years of age in Henamulla received a letter in Tamil and Sinhalese from the Women's Bureau with an invitation to attend a meeting in Henamulla to discuss their needs and priorities for income generation. In spite of rainy weather, more than 200 women turned up. The women made it clear that they wanted jobs, not training, unless the training led directly to an income. During the following week the women themselves prepared a list with 131 names of women who wanted to start income-generating activities, e.g. *papadam* making, *beedi* labelling, soap making, pasting of paper bags, and packeting. Many women, most of them unmarried, said they would prefer to work outside Henamulla, but the majority of the married ones, especially the Muslim women, indicated their preference for home-based work.

Another meeting was held at which it was planned that a full-day study tour of work sites with women from Henamulla would be undertaken to give them broader horizons of employment possibilities. The actual study visits were made to a bakery, a book-binding shop, a coir-rope production centre, and homes in the slums where thread-balls and joss-sticks were made. The study programme was considered a great success by the ten participants, who had been selected by the women themselves on an ethnically representative basis.

Coir-rope Production

Following the recommendations of Mr Bandula de Silva, Director, Department of Small Industries, and the Project Committee, training in coir-rope production was started in Henamulla in January 1980. Henamulla was the only area which had enough space to start coir-rope production. Ten women from Henimulla had their first introduction to coir-rope production in October at the Ambatala Centre just outside Colombo. Initially a full-time paid woman demonstrator was provided to give a two-month training course in coir-rope production in Henamulla. The UDA allocated space in its building in Henamulla for raw materials, equipment and coir rope. The DSI also agreed to provide all raw materials and market the finished product.

Although, in the beginning, the women participating in the programme received Rs.5 per day from the DSI during the training period, today the stipend of Rs.150 per month is being given by UNICEF. After gaining experience the trainees were able to earn Rs.3 per day in addition to the stipend. At least 20 women today receive training for four or five hours per day. After the training programme, they are able to get a reasonable "income support" from coir-rope production.

UNICEF has given the Women's Bureau financial assistance in procuring the necessary equipment from the DSI - five coir-rope spinning sets, work tables, shelves, benches, cupboards, chairs and a weighing machine.

By and large this training is being given to the illiterate and semi-literate women of the area, in the 18-22 age group. The training imparted to these women is successful, but their income does not exceed Rs.200 per month which is not considered adequate by them. It was further observed that women considered coir-rope production work to be associated with the low caste people and so they tended to avoid participation in this work.

Book-binding Project

Ten girls, aged between 18 and 22 years, whether married or unmarried, having passed grade 8 are taken as trainees for book-binding, which in Sri Lanka is not considered to be a traditional occupation for women. The period of training is for three months at the Government Press, during which time they are given a stipend of Rs.212 per month by the National Apprenticeship Board. During the period of a general strike in 1980 all the trainees got employment in the Press on daily wages. Later the trainees organised themselves into a cooperative book-binding society at Henamulla, and today they are engaged in the production of books for office use. Firm established orders are obtained from the Colombo Municipality, cooperative societies and the Charity Commissioner's Department, which are then implemented by the trainees. On an average, the earnings of the women in this trade range from Rs.300 to Rs.400 per month.

Bakery Training

This is another venture where 25 determined women have invaded a domain monopolised by men. Training is provided at the Marketing Department Bakery for one year to girls of between 18 and 22 years who have passed grade 8. On completion of their training it is hoped they will get employment at the Marketing Department Bakery, which will ensure a salary of Rs.300-400 per month.

PROPOSED PROJECTS FOR 1981-83

1. *Expansion of on-going projects*

- (a) Coir-rope project: expansion to produce coir brooms, mats and carpets.
- (b) Book-binding project: target of four additional book-binding cooperatives by 1983.
- (c) Bakery project: subsequent to training, either to help women to be self-employed or to take up jobs in the Marketing Department Bakery.

2. *New projects*

- (a) Leadership training programme. It has been decided to train 50 girls from each Community Development Council of the Colombo Municipality to take the leadership in their own community.
- (b) Textile weaving project, sponsored by Barbara Sansoni Ltd. It is proposed that a textile weaving project be organised to train 44 women and produce textiles for the Barbara Sansoni Company.
- (c) Electrical wiring, radio repairs and carpentry, etc.

The Department of Local Government, with aid from the World Bank, is proposing to organise a vocational training centre to train young men and women in these fields. Thirteen girls from urban slums will receive vocational training in these areas.

In order to make a physical improvement to the area, the Women's Bureau collaborating with the Common Amenities Board, has accelerated construction work, altered existing bucket latrines, provided community taps and built brick houses. Approximately 15 per cent of the population today have benefited from this work.

In the sphere of family health education, which earlier was the task of the Colombo Municipality, the Women's Bureau, assisted by the Family Planning

Association, has created a cadre of health personnel designated "Health Wardens". The Health Wardens concern themselves with health education, maintenance of environmental sanitation, and community development work. Today, in fact, they have become an active channel of communication between the slum dwellers on the one hand and public health personnel (with regard to environmental health), public health nurses and public health midwives (with regard to maternity and child-care problems) on the other.

The training of the Health Wardens is for a period of six to eight weeks under the direction of the Chief Medical Officer of Health. Subsequently they get a certificate from the Municipality and are then allotted three wards each and assisted there by labourers. They emphasise environmental hygiene. In addition to looking at posters depicting the detrimental effect of flies and mosquitoes, the slum dwellers learn about health from radio programmes, film shows and exhibitions on maternal and child care.

The Health Wardens at Henamulla, with the assistance of other Public Health personnel of the Colombo Municipality and other governmental officers working in the area, are assisting the slum dwellers to establish a nuclear Community Development Council. The Council is to comprise at least 75 householders (interested community residents), a Health Warden (Secretary of the Council); a teacher from a local school and representatives from religious organisations and other non-government organisations.

The representatives of various agencies operating in the area envisage further improvements in the existing conditions of the slum, e.g. upgrading of water supply and latrine facilities for another 15 per cent of the population, initiating of pilot projects to provide basic education for children not attending schools, establishment of more day-care centres for children of working mothers, and extension of vocational training programmes for women in the field of *papadam* preparation, educational toys, rattan-weaving of chairs, pasting paper bags, and soap and candle preparation.

It is hoped that through an integrated approach women will not only be active participants in national development but also, through greater awareness, improve their family life. With the success obtained in the area of Henamulla, similar activities are expected to start in other selected slum areas of Colombo.

IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME ON THE COMMUNITY

Interviews with the slum dwellers revealed that they felt the impact of the programme basically in respect of the improvement of the physical conditions in Henamulla. Today, they note, several brick houses had come up, a large number of bucket latrines had been constructed, and pipe water was available in taps (one tap for every 50 households). Owing to frequent visits and talks by representatives of various governmental and non-governmental agencies, greater awareness had been created on aspects of health and nutrition. Whereas people had earlier hesitated to visit the dispensary, located 100 yards away from the slum, today most mothers lose no time in taking medical advice. While mothers have become aware of the need for a nutritious diet, yet paucity of funds compels them to live on an unbalanced menu; even today several cook only one meal a day of rice and seasonal vegetables, while others who have two meals, although non-vegetarians, can scarcely afford fish or meat.

Interviewees felt that training for school drop-outs was needed more than literacy classes. In the main, the slum dwellers felt that some action was needed to further improve their household income. On account of the income-

generating programme introduced by the Women's Bureau, there has been an additional income of Rs.250 to Rs.300 per month among women who have received training. The supplementary income is being spent mainly on improvement of diet in the home. In their view, the training facilities offered are too few in number and limited to barely 30 women in each area.

On the whole, the impact of the Project has been felt by the entire community, and women in particular. Although the family size even today exceeds five or six members, members of the younger generation feel that they would limit the family to two or three children only. The community members are aware of the high cost of living and desire to have more than one earning member in the family, emphasis being more on vocational rather than academic education.

MAJOR CONSTRAINTS OF THE PROGRAMME

The Women's Bureau felt the following to be the major constraints in reaching the desired objectives:

1. absence of systematic tabulated data on the situation of women and on those related to the beneficiary groups (this factor makes it difficult to plan future programmes);
2. lack of regular funding for projects - the Women's Bureau was established with foreign funds, and therefore is dependent on other agencies for money required in making any programme a success;
3. lack of coordination between the various agencies operating in the area. Although representatives of all agencies do meet, very often the quorum is not complete; this results in delays and bottlenecks to any programme;
4. scarcity of trained personnel.

In view of the constraints the following recommendations are being made:

1. Data collection - more specific data should be collected covering the beneficiaries of the project. This data needs to be systematically tabulated.
2. Regular funding - not only should the Central Government allocate money for the running of the Women's Bureau, but monetary provision should also be made for project activities.
3. Training programmes should be initiated for personnel at the district level. These individuals should be given a greater understanding of the problems faced by the women in slum areas.
4. Decisions on programme implementation should be vested in one authority rather than being dependent upon the consensus of opinion of all the representatives at the monthly meetings.
5. A committee should be formed to monitor and evaluate the programmes. At the end of each year, the committee should give an objective review of the various programmes.

Observations

Several things emerge from the present case study which could be considered if a replica of this model is to be followed in other urban towns of developing countries.

1. Although it is advantageous to have several government and non-governmental agencies functioning in different areas, progress of the project tends to be held up on account of lack of cooperation and coordination. It is therefore suggested that implementation of action should be vested in one authority only.
2. Credit facilities should be more easily available through the Cooperative Bank or from a nationalised bank through a trade union. This would prevent the already deprived people from pawning articles on heavy interest. The need for credit will be even greater when women enter the self-employment field for which money may be required in the initial stages.
3. Greater provision for developing income-generating skills among women could be made, but along with this a more organised marketing infrastructure must be created to keep the products moving.
4. Considering that drunkenness, gambling etc., lead to frequent marital conflicts, it would be desirable to have a community (*panchayat*) council assisted by a trained social worker from among the respected inhabitants. This council could meet every fortnight to sort out household problems.
5. It would be feasible and desirable to have common community halls where recreational facilities for young and old, men and women, could be provided, e.g. table tennis, carrom, television, badminton, etc.
6. Leadership within the community needs to be developed; this may help in curbing the existing anti-social incidents.