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Plans for Dharavi: negotiating a reconciliation between a state-driven market redevelopment and residents' aspirations

SHEELA PATEL AND JOCKIN ARPUTHAM

Sheela Patel was one of the founders of SPARC, the Indian NGO set up in 1984 to explore innovative ways of working in partnerships with the urban poor, and began to work with the women pavement dwellers in Mumbai. From 1986 onwards, she has worked in partnership with the National Slum Dwellers Federation and with Mahila Milan. She also works with Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI), which is formed of federations of slum and shack dwellers from 22 nations and their support NGOs.

She was a member of the Millennium Project taskforce on improving the lives of slum dwellers and is an advisor to the United Nations Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor.

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Jockin Arputham became a community organizer in the 1960s when the slum where he lived, Janata colony, was threatened with demolition. When Janata was bulldozed, despite official assurances that this would not happen, he realized that slum dwellers would never be able to stop forced evictions and influence government policies unless

ABSTRACT This paper describes and discusses the changes in the government's plans to redevelop Dharavi in Mumbai in response to pressure and protest by Dharavi residents, grassroots organizations and a local group of eminent citizens (Concerned Citizens for Dharavi), and as a result of international pressure.

KEYWORDS city redevelopment / evictions / grassroots / resettlement / social movements

I. BACKGROUND

Dharavi, a large inner-city township in Mumbai that is often said to be one of Asia's largest slums is to be redeveloped, and the means through which it will be redeveloped are currently under discussion. Our paper in the October 2007 issue of *Environment & Urbanization* described how the government of Maharashtra's plans for the Dharavi Redevelopment Project (DRP) divided Dharavi into sectors for which international companies would bid for the right to develop.⁽¹⁾ Although the DRP acknowledged that redevelopment must rehouse or resettle Dharavi's current population, there was no consultation with the residents or enterprises in Dharavi. There were serious concerns that commercial developers would seek to minimize the costs of rehousing the population and maximize the amount of land cleared for commercial development. With no clear policy or official documentation on who would be entitled to rehousing or resettlement, or on grievance redressal for those who would be left out, residents feared that many households and business enterprises stood to lose their homes and places of work. Thus, the homes and livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of Mumbai inhabitants are at stake, as is the future of thousands of local businesses in Dharavi that are of considerable importance not only for livelihoods but also for Mumbai's economy.

Concerns about this redevelopment project led to an open letter in May 2007 by Jockin Arputham, the head of the National Slum Dwellers Federation, offering the government and the developers interested in Dharavi's redevelopment a partnership if they worked with the inhabitants and businesses in Dharavi – or a promise of conflict if they did not.⁽²⁾

This paper describes the negotiations around Dharavi's redevelopment between April and December 2007 and the changes in the government's

position. It responds to an invitation from the editors of *Environment & Urbanization* to report regularly on plans for Dharavi's redevelopment,⁽³⁾ and we will continue to prepare short reports on developments in Dharavi for future issues of the journal. In part, this is because of Dharavi's importance for Mumbai's future development from a point of view of how the residents of Dharavi benefit (or not) from such development. But in addition, the way in which Dharavi is redeveloped will influence the city's future strategies for dealing with slum dwellers, at a time when real estate development has so much global capital pouring into Mumbai in response to increased demand for high-end housing and commercial space. Will it prove possible for the city and state government agencies involved to support Dharavi's redevelopment in ways that actually constitute development and improvement for its hundreds of thousands of inhabitants in terms of their accommodation, their living conditions and access to services and livelihoods? Or will these be pushed aside or very inadequately addressed because of the profits that commercial development can generate here? What happens in Dharavi also has a wider importance for India and for successful cities in other low- and middle-income nations. We hope that Dharavi's redevelopment will show that it is possible to make the process benefit both the inhabitants and the wider city's economic development. We also want to show how development plans in each neighbourhood within Dharavi can be negotiated and developed with the people and enterprises located there. If this is possible in such a large and valuable inner-city site in one of Asia's most dynamic and successful cities, it would set precedents that will have relevance and value for other cities. The "diary approach" allows us to share details of developments and of the negotiations between the different groups with a much larger constituency and we hope that this ongoing reportage will be of interest to readers and help stimulate discussion and debate.

We also need to make it clear that we are not researchers, but people working within organizations committed to ensuring that Dharavi's redevelopment benefits its inhabitants and involves them and their own grassroots organizations in its design, implementation and management. As will be described at the end of this paper, we agreed to commit both of our organizations – SPARC and the National Slum Dwellers Federation – in alliance with Mahila Milan, to undertaking a detailed baseline household survey of Dharavi. This will build on our previous experience with such surveys and can provide a much stronger basis for residents' influence on and involvement in redevelopment.⁽⁴⁾

II. PROMOTING ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT PLANS

Two groups have been particularly active in questioning the validity of the Dharavi Redevelopment Project (DRP) and in suggesting alternative approaches. The first is a group called the Concerned Citizens for Dharavi, chaired by Mr Sukhtankar, a retired chief secretary of Maharashtra state. This group wrote to the chief minister of Maharashtra in May 2007, raising many concerns about the DRP. It was addressed to the chief minister of the state government of Maharashtra because the DRP is organized and managed by the state government; Mumbai is the state capital and much the largest city. A summary of the points raised in this letter is included

they were organized. He founded India's National Slum Dwellers Federation and, working with Mahila Milan (a federation of savings groups formed by women slum and pavement dwellers) and SPARC (a Mumbai-based NGO), has offered city and state governments all over India partnerships for slum redevelopment – and many successful partnerships are underway. He also helped found Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI), through which federations of slum and shack dwellers in more than 20 countries support each other and learn from each other. In 2001, he was awarded the Ramon Magsaysay Award.

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1. Patel, Sheela and Jockin Arputham (2007), "An offer of partnership or a promise of conflict in Dharavi, Mumbai?", *Environment & Urbanization* Vol 19, No 2, October, pages 501–508.

2. See reference 1.

3. Editors' note: We invited Sheela Patel and Jockin Arputham to produce a report every six months about progress on the Dharavi Redevelopment Project. We believe that this will provide many insights into how low-income groups and their own organizations can seek to make city redevelopment work for them, and the difficulties they face in doing so.

4. See Patel, Sheela and Kalpana Sharma (1998), "One David and three Goliaths: avoiding anti-poor solutions to Mumbai's transport problems", *Environment & Urbanization* Vol 10, No 2, October, pages 149–159; also Patel, Sheela, Celine d'Crux and Sundar Burra (2002), "Beyond evictions in a global city: people-managed resettlement in Mumbai", *Environment & Urbanization* Vol 14, No 1, April, pages 159–172.

below. The second group consists of the residents of Dharavi, organized under two groupings. The first is the Dharavi Bachao Andolan (Save Dharavi Movement), a coalition of different sets of associations, cooperatives and networks who came together to protest against the government's plan to redevelop Dharavi. The second is the Dharavi Vikas Samittee (Dharavi Development Committee), a federation of cooperatives and business leaders who were formed in 1987 when an earlier version of a plan to redevelop Dharavi was announced by the state. This committee was formed as a result of an earlier enumeration undertaken by the alliance of SPARC, Mahila Milan and the National Slum Dwellers Federation to counter a pronouncement in 1986–87 by the government of Maharashtra that there were 55,000 houses in Dharavi (at the time, there was no acceptance of the very large concentration of businesses there). This earlier enumeration showed that there were 81,000+ structures and more than 120,000 households and businesses. Recently, these two groups have come together and will be involved jointly in seeking a redevelopment of Dharavi that the people of Dharavi want. They have sought to increase the pressure on the state – and to highlight the fact that not only the poor had strong objections to the way that the DRP is being organized but also many eminent local citizens and international academics.

The following is an extract from this letter to the chief minister of Maharashtra, followed by a summary of the issues it raised:⁽⁵⁾

“I am writing to you on behalf of several organizations – including academic institutions and NGOs – as well as on behalf of different individuals who are concerned with the DRP as it stands today... In this letter we will list the issues which concern us, raise certain objections to the present DRP, ask certain questions and make certain recommendations as to a future roadmap. We are aware that the government of Maharashtra has sanctioned the DRP but we feel that it should be scrutinized afresh. The people of Dharavi are largely ignorant about [the] DRP, but those who are aware of it oppose it very fiercely. As a group, we are concerned that if the legitimate aspirations of the people of Dharavi are not met, their anger will spill out onto the streets.... In order to avoid such a possible confrontation, it would be prudent to have a thorough re-look at [the] DRP. Our issues are listed below.”

a. Legal issues

The DRP does not conform to the legal requirement for a special planning authority to prepare and publish the draft plan and proposals for inviting suggestions and objections. This plan is, in effect, an attempt to implement an existing development plan, but with a change in the Floor Space Index (FSI) (to provide incentives for private developers⁽⁶⁾).

It would be incorrect to go ahead with the existing development plan, which is completely out of date. There have been so many changes within Dharavi in terms of the number of people living there, the number of structures there, the kinds of activities undertaken today, the programmes implemented (e.g. the Prime Minister's Grant Project) and the increased connectivity of Dharavi with the rest of the city.

5. Explanatory text in brackets has been added by the authors to help clarify certain points for readers unfamiliar with some of the issues raised.

6. The Floor Space Index (FSI) is a ratio that defines how much floor space can be constructed on a site relative to the site's total area. For instance, an FSI of 2.5 would allow 2,500 square metres of apartments to be built on a 1,000 square-metre plot. Obviously, the higher the FSI permitted on any site, the greater the potential profit for development there, especially in a valuable, central-city site like Dharavi. The official FSI for the city of Mumbai (including Dharavi) is 1.33 (and 1.0 in the suburbs). The basis for encouraging private developers to develop Dharavi (and avoid a need for government investment) is the offer of a higher FSI (or what is often termed an incentive FSI over the 1.33 FSI). The higher the FSI, the greater the potential profit – but also the higher the density. For more details, see Burra, Sundar (2005), “Towards a pro-poor slum upgrading framework in Mumbai, India”, *Environment & Urbanization* Vol 17, No 1, April, pages 67–88.

b. Survey and data collection

One of the key issues for Dharavi's redevelopment is the extent to which it serves those who live and work in Dharavi – for instance, exactly who is entitled to be rehoused (and in what form and where) and what provisions are made for their enterprises or workspaces. The exact population of Dharavi is unknown, and the census data for Dharavi and the figures used by the Slum Rehabilitation Authority (SRA) (which is in charge of the redevelopment) do not match. The basis for the SRA's estimation of 57,000 tenements in Dharavi is also unknown, and the basis for establishing who is eligible for "resettlement" is also unclear – for instance, a person or family's eligibility for rehousing might require them to have proof that they were residents at the beginning of 1995 or at the beginning of 2000. Obviously, the date that is chosen and the kind of documentation that is required for proof have major implications for the number of "eligible" families. Our own population projections based on census reports suggest that the numbers are much larger than those estimated by the DRP. If the size of the population of Dharavi is unclear, it will be difficult to plan for its redevelopment. Only a baseline demographic-cum-socioeconomic survey, which is open to public scrutiny, can give us the absolutely essential data needed for planning.

The number of structures in Dharavi has not been determined and their various purposes (e.g residential, residential and commercial, industrial, religious, educational and health) are not known. If any survey has been conducted, the methodology has not been published and nor have the findings. There is a need for an infrastructure survey to assess existing conditions and the extent and nature of deficiencies.

The DRP does not present any data on ownership that can help to establish the pockets that can be redeveloped and those that have to be left out.

No detailed physical survey showing the topography of the Dharavi area has been carried out. This is particularly important because large sections of Dharavi are prone to flooding, and such a survey is very necessary in order to establish natural drainage systems, flood-prone areas and soil conditions, which are critical in any planning for redevelopment.

c. Projection studies and planning standards

The implications of the increase in Dharavi's population that will be brought about by the "sale component" (as developers are granted permission to increase the FSI within Dharavi, which means more commercial and residential space will be available for sale) have not been considered. Thus, the implications for required land use distribution, amenities, infrastructure, traffic and urban form have neither been understood nor carefully assessed. It is only on the basis of these projections that strategies for the design of the master plan can be conceived. For example, without projections for the increased volume of vehicular traffic, people and commercial activities, there is no basis for traffic planning.

d. Planning, design and dissemination

An existing land use survey needs to be undertaken and a proposed land use plan prepared and published; objections and suggestions for modifications

to this have to be invited. Not only is this mandatory under law, it also becomes a way of involving the community and its representative organizations in the planning of Dharavi. This land use plan also needs to show how Dharavi residents are to be accommodated on 65 per cent of the land. At present, residents are not aware of where they will be resettled: for example, it might be in the worst low-lying and flood-prone areas of Dharavi. The proposed development plan shows that some sectors have smaller areas assigned to rehousing residents than others but this does not seem to reflect the population densities in these sectors. There is a concern that some sectors will have higher densities and taller buildings for rehousing than others.

There are concerns about what increase in Floor Space Index should be allowed. This is one of the core concerns for the redevelopment project because the higher the ratio that is permitted (or what is sometimes termed the "bonus FSI" to the developer), the more apartments or commercial buildings the developers can build for sale. But the higher the FSI, the greater the likelihood that residents will be rehoused in high-rise blocks and the lesser the provision per person for public amenities, including open spaces, footpaths and educational and health facilities. We recommend that the government look at methods to reduce densities, which means a reduction in the bonus FSI offered to the developers of each sector. One of the great attractions of the DRP for government agencies was that it needed no government funding (the developers would cover all the investment costs because of the profits they could make on these developments); indeed, the DRP as conceived at this time promised very substantial funding for the government from the redevelopment.

It would be possible for the government to break even with only a 0.25 bonus FSI, which is much lower than what is currently proposed. The government has to find the balance between densities and profit in order to achieve a humane living environment.

The present DRP does not deal in depth with strategies for land use, traffic, urban form, infrastructure, housing typologies and environment. One example of this is the hint that Dharavi may be served by a new metro system, but there is no detail about its likely route and the corresponding locations of stations. Obviously, these routes and locations would be a key influence on Dharavi's land use pattern.

The redevelopment model divides Dharavi into sectors that completely ignore the existing "community" boundaries that are based on *nagars*. These have evolved over the years from community claims over property, from occupations such as tanneries, and religious boundaries. Existing *nagar* boundaries must be central to the planning process.

There is no coherent plan to link up the proposed infrastructure in Dharavi with the city's infrastructure. If individual developers take on the development of the sectors they are assigned, how can it be ensured that they fit in with the infrastructure provided by the municipal corporation? For example, if *nallas* (natural drains) are diverted or built upon, this can lead to a flooding emergency as has occurred in Mumbai in the recent past. A plan for linking Dharavi's proposed infrastructure with that of the areas outside Dharavi needs to be prepared, with a clear definition of roles and responsibilities between the special planning authority, the different government agencies and private developers.

We note with surprise that this huge project, involving more than 500,000 people and a planned investment of more than Rs 9,000 crore

(around US\$ 3.6 billion), has no environmental impact assessment. We suggest that one must be undertaken at the township level, and commissioned by the government rather than by individual developers for their own "sectors".

e. Issues regarding the lack of clarity of purpose of the DRP

Alternative development scenarios for Dharavi show that a much lower incentive FSI would still allow the development to break even financially, but with much lower densities and with ground-plus-three (four-storey) or ground-plus-four (five-storey) buildings instead of high rises. Our contention is that if the purpose of the project is to redevelop Dharavi without the government of Maharashtra spending money, it is possible to do so by offering even a 0.25 incentive FSI. **We feel that enabling huge profits for the developers and huge revenues for the government of India should not be the main purpose of the project. As an extension to this argument, there is also no need to increase the cap of permissible FSI to 4.0.**

Although the government claims that the DRP is a project initiated by the government of Maharashtra, the tasks of conducting surveys, planning, design and construction have all been left to private developers. The government's role of negotiating and reconciling the interests of various groups, including its own interests, the public interest and that of the community, has not been fulfilled. The role of government as arbitrator needs to be spelt out.

One of the justifications for allocating Dharavi a higher FSI is that this is the only way of attracting developers to a "difficult area". But now that Dharavi is being redeveloped as a township, and considering its extremely advantageous central location with excellent overall connectivity, the redevelopment of Dharavi would be very lucrative even with a much lower bonus FSI. Dharavi is also very close to the Bandra Kurla complex, which commands some of the highest real estate prices in the world. Thus, detailed financial planning has to be undertaken to establish the need and extent of the bonus FSI required for the DRP.

f. Lack of clarity regarding institutional roles

The DRP is considered a government project in partnership with private developers. But critical state functions such as master planning, environmental assessments and the seeking of mandatory clearances have been handed over to the developers. It is not at all clear how the government of Maharashtra can hold developers to account for their commitments. For example, the DRP claims that the developers will maintain the buildings where the population will be rehoused and will pay for elevator maintenance for a certain number of years.⁽⁷⁾ What mechanism is there to enforce such an obligation? Roles need to be re-assessed and contractual provisions must be clarified.

Similarly, the plan speaks of providing various amenities such as schools and health centres, but there is no mention of who will establish and run them or how they will be made affordable to low-income groups,

7. The need for the developers to pay for elevator maintenance may sound relatively trivial but it is a good example of the difficulties in supporting city redevelopment in ways that benefit low-income groups. Past experience with rehousing low-income households in high-rise buildings showed that paying for the electricity to run the elevators and also the service costs were a problem – to the point where, in some high-rise developments, the elevators were not used. The problems this presents for families living on the upper floors is obvious.

except for vague statements about some individuals promising to do some things. Also, it is doubtful whether such facilities would be open to existing communities, as has been seen with many private developments on public land. Memoranda of understanding and commitments from public and private authorities to establish and manage the proposed amenities are needed, with guaranteed access for low-income groups. The government of Maharashtra should prepare a document spelling out clearly the roles and responsibilities of different public and private actors in the planning and implementation of the DRP.

g. Issues regarding the absence of community participation

We feel that the redevelopment plan has not provided any space for community participation. This is surprising, since one of the main principles of democracy and development planning is the involvement of the community in its own development. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments reflect the commitment of the Indian state to democratic decentralization and community participation, which has, unfortunately, been completely ignored.

The people of Dharavi have virtually no information on the DRP other than it is a sector plan. They do not know who is eligible for rehabilitation, what their entitlements are, the locations of the transit tenements where they will be housed while redevelopment takes place, and where their permanent accommodation will be. They do not know what measures to take to protect their livelihoods and what types of housing will be provided. Furthermore, many residents have larger families, thereby making the 225 square feet space (the size of the resettlement apartments they are promised) inadequate for their purposes. Has the government considered making additional area available to them, either as a profit-sharing mechanism with the developers or as additional purchasable property? Similarly, should not the residential development (as a “free sale” component) by private developers have a mandatory component of lower- and middle-income housing?

We strongly urge the government of Maharashtra to re-introduce the clause of consent, so that the people can become involved in the redevelopment process. (In slum redevelopment plans, there is a requirement that 70 per cent of the population agree to the redevelopment, but the government has claimed that no such consent is needed in this case because the DRP is part of an already agreed development plan.) The government of Maharashtra should draw up a document to institutionalize community participation at every stage of the DRP: surveying, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

h. Other issues

There is a lack of clarity about exactly what land is to come within the RDP. Some communities in Dharavi appear to be within the plan in some documents or presentations, and not in others. There are also some areas where a bonus FSI of 1.33 is not needed – for instance, those communities remaining in municipal housing, as these are not high density and do not qualify as “difficult areas”.

The letter ends:

“In conclusion, we would like to say that the DRP needs to be examined afresh. In the light of the above objections/suggestions/recommendations, the Slum Rehabilitation Authority model itself may be unsuitable for Dharavi in view of its peculiar circumstances. An appropriate model needs to be developed. As a group, we would be happy to work with the government of Maharashtra to prepare a road map for the development of Dharavi that will be based on public scrutiny of all data; that will have the consent of the community; that will respect the links between housing and livelihoods; that will have diverse housing typologies to suit varied lifestyles and occupational factors as well as income groups; that will keep densities at manageable levels and restrict the role of developers to bidding for construction contracts. It should be possible to develop a low-rise, high-density settlement at Dharavi that keeps maintenance costs low and livability conditions high.”

III. GOVERNMENT RESPONSES

At first, it seemed that the May 2007 letter from the Concerned Citizens for Dharavi, the pressure from the grassroots organizations within Dharavi and the widespread coverage in the international press of Jockin's public letter offering the government and developers a partnership had had little effect. In late May, the state government placed advertisements inviting international developers to submit formal expressions of interest in the DRP. The advertisement stated that a shortlist of developers who had applied would be drawn up in September 2007. The response from community leaders in Dharavi was clear and simple: to the state, don't ignore us; to the investors, Dharavi is not a greenfield site, hundreds of thousands of people live there and they will not just passively accept the state's plans. Please ask the state to undertake a survey and provide you with a detailed brief of what you need to ensure within the redevelopment. We are sure you don't want to have newspaper and TV footage of your bulldozers coming up against local communities protesting.

Opposition to the redevelopment project became more visible in June 2007, as black flags were hoisted onto electricity poles around Dharavi. On 23 June, a procession of about 15,000 people walked peacefully from Dharavi to the office of the Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority, a distance of about two kilometres. Representatives from all the different social groups in Dharavi, including members of various parties and shopkeepers, joined the peaceful march, which served several purposes. First, it was a clear visual symbol of unified dissent against what the state was planning. Second, it demonstrated to the communities and to the city the impact that Dharavi residents could have by just stepping out of their homes and coming onto the street. The march could have been organized in a way that could have caused chaos with the traffic, but the organizers chose not to do so. However, the march reminded the government that the inhabitants of Dharavi could easily block all the roads and train tracks that are close to Dharavi, and this would virtually suspend the flow of north-south traffic in the city. A video clip of this event is on You-tube now, and is entitled “Save Dharavi”.⁽⁸⁾

8. See <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=5tE1gF4eZ5M>.

This procession of protesters clearly worried the state. But the government's initial response was to offer minor changes to the proposal. These were unacceptable to the communities in Dharavi and to the Concerned Citizens for Dharavi. Meanwhile, this group began to document households, buildings and enterprises in Dharavi – in order to develop a range of proposed housing redevelopment typologies, working spaces and a possible strategy for solutions with assistance from some involved and interested professional architects and planners.

The key concerns raised in the May 2007 letter summarized above were then supported by a letter to India's prime minister, dated 19 July 2007 and signed by 23 well-known academics, artists and researchers from around the world, anchored by Professor Arjun Appadurai.⁽⁹⁾ This stated that:

"We, the undersigned academics, artists, researchers and professionals, are writing to you with a profound sense of disquiet about the DRP in Mumbai. Many of us greatly admire your efforts to promote meaningful and inclusive development in India and are conscious of the difficulties you face in balancing the needs of the nation with the rights of the slum dwellers. Without impugning the good faith of those who have drawn up the DRP, we nonetheless wish to register our urgent concern. All of us are deeply concerned about India and, of course, Mumbai. Some of us have visited Dharavi and are familiar with the problems and issues. Some of us are familiar with the efforts of the group made up of Mr D M Sukthankar, Mr Shirish Patel and other distinguished citizens of Mumbai to alert the government of Maharashtra to the several drawbacks of the existing DRP. They have documented the legal, procedural and other lapses in their letter of 9 May 2007 to the chief minister. The letter is indeed a comprehensive critique of DRP."

This letter then listed some of the key points made in this earlier letter, including the following:

- In drawing up the DRP, the government of Maharashtra has not followed the procedure prescribed by law of publishing a plan and inviting objections and suggestions.
- There have been no surveys of population, households, structures, ownership and topography, and hence there is no data or basis for a plan that will disrupt the lives of several hundred thousand people.
- There is a lack of studies projecting the increased population of Dharavi after redevelopment, with no mention of planning standards.
- Local residents of Dharavi have virtually no information on the DRP.
- It is profoundly undemocratic to do away with the requirement that at least 70 per cent of the people must consent to any slum redevelopment scheme. This move strikes at the heart of the constitutional mandate for democratic decentralization. There is no space for community participation.
- The extent of increased FSI will lead to unsupportable population densities.
- There is no mention of any strategy for land use, traffic, urban form, infrastructure, housing typologies or environment.
- There is no plan to link the proposed infrastructure with the city's infrastructure.

9. Arjun Appadurai is the John Dewey Professor in Social Sciences at The New School in New York City. He is also the founder and now the President of PUKAR (Partners for Urban Knowledge Action and Research), a non-profit organization based in and oriented to the city of Mumbai. See Appadurai, Arjun (2001), "Deep democracy: urban governmentality and the horizon of politics", *Environment & Urbanization* Vol 13, No 2, October, pages 23–43.

- It is feared that if the DRP is implemented, the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of people will be destroyed without any alternatives offered.

The letter concluded as follows:

“We understand that the people of Dharavi are deeply disturbed at the prospect of the DRP implementation. We urge you and the chief minister of Maharashtra to look afresh at the DRP in the light of the comments above and seek the approval of the community at large before finalizing any proposal.”

Then in late August 2007, changes in the government’s position became evident. A senior government official – the Officer on Special Duty for Dharavi (Dr Chandrasekhar⁽¹⁰⁾) – consulted with all the various actors to establish what each wanted. He was also convinced of the need to undertake a baseline survey of Dharavi – which was one of the key recommendations of the Concerned Citizens for Dharavi, and he recognized the need for other studies such as a transport study and an infrastructure assessment study. He commissioned these and began to invite various groups to make official representations. The Concerned Citizens for Dharavi met with him and noted his willingness to listen to the concerns expressed about the DRP and his initial agreement to undertake a baseline survey of structures as well as transport and infrastructure studies. However, Dr Chandrasekhar also made clear that he would not be able to reverse everything. This means that the expressions of interest and the tenders for redevelopment with some modifications would continue but they would be informed by these studies.

The expressions of interest bids are being processed and the final tender document is being developed. What this means is that the possibilities for external developers to undertake the financing and construction will continue but the demands and expectations of the residents and the outcomes of the transport and infrastructure studies will be included in the terms of reference.

Dr Chandrasekhar then invited the Dharavi residents’ representatives to a meeting, where he listened to their concerns and suggestions and assured them that he would keep them informed and involved in the development process. These assurances were certainly an improvement on past lines of communication with residents. And while no real formal documentation followed this set of talks, the changes in what the special government cell working on Dharavi was doing was an indication of the government’s changed position.

Prior to the meetings, a tender was announced for conducting the much-needed baseline survey in Dharavi. This survey would document and number all the structures and, through a socioeconomic survey, would identify, for instance, what activities occur. It would also review what documentation residents or businesses living there have. At the time, SPARC did not apply to undertake the survey. As it was a member of the committee of Concerned Citizens for Dharavi, such an act would have sent a message that SPARC accepted the present position of the state and, at this point, there was still no formal evidence of any change in the government’s position. Another NGO, MASHAL, won the bid and began work on the survey. From the outset, they offered SPARC the possibility of undertaking the work jointly (given SPARC’s experience with detailed

10. Dharavi, being deemed a slum, comes under the Slum Rehabilitation Authority (SRA). However, since the government set up the redevelopment of Dharavi as a special project, a senior officer of the government of Maharashtra manages this project and is called the Officer on Special Duty (OSD) for Dharavi.

household surveys/enumerations) but SPARC initially refused because it was not clear that the state had changed their position – and also because of an unrealistic timetable, an unacceptable survey format and an inadequate budget.

But many groups urged SPARC to help. The residents' associations and local political groups from Dharavi demanded that the alliance of SPARC, Mahila Milan and the National Slum Dwellers Federation undertake the survey. The Officer on Special Duty also pressed for this, noting the past experience of these three groups in working together on such activities. The committee of Concerned Citizens for Dharavi felt that if the changes necessary for the alliance of SPARC, Mahila Milan and the National Slum Dwellers Federation to undertake the survey were agreed to, then SPARC should do it.

So, in early December 2007, an agreement was reached whereby the baseline socioeconomic survey would be done jointly by SPARC and MASHAL. SPARC will work with Dharavi's inhabitants and local community organizations to undertake the enumeration of all structures and also the household survey. This survey will put all the data on the structures, land ownership, structure usage, open areas and land in other special uses into a computerized GIS-based database and thus provide the basis for future planning. We plan to report on how the baseline survey went and what the implications are for the DRP in the next issue of *Environment & Urbanization*.

As we move into this new space of undertaking the survey, we are asked whether the state will really listen, and whether we are capable of carrying both the state and community aspirations. We ourselves ask these questions. The reality is that real development interventions are always very high risk activities. To avoid engaging in these means to abdicate the duties and obligations of those who have the trust of the poor to be honest brokers between mainstream development and the aspirations of the poor. Having accepted this challenge we know we are now committed to staying in this process, along with the residents of Dharavi.

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