



SEWA Bharat

All India Federation of Self-Employed Women's Association

# “Our children can now play safely outside” - A Case Study of Jahangirpuri

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Families living in lane number 200 of Jahangirpuri's B Block had always stepped inside their homes with muddy shoes. Dirty water overflowing from clogged drains along the lane would meander down the lane and then make its way inside the homes of those living on the ground floor. Over the past decades, the municipal body had relaid the road, causing it to be at a higher level than the surrounding houses, most of which were much older constructions. These houses were built over plots that Delhi government's erstwhile Slum and JJ Department<sup>1</sup> had allotted to families that were resettled from slum tenements in the 1970s, a 'possession slip' conferring them user rights to the plot and the dwelling. During the day, women and children can be found outside their homes – the women just freed up from their chores and resting and chatting up, and children on their baby cycles and candy sticks dashing around in the narrow lane. Some women who are home-based workers, can be seen swiftly manoeuvring with the fabric with swift movements of intricate stitches, finishing work till the sunlight lasts.

With the onset of SEWA's land rights programme in Jahangirpuri in late 2019, the local community leaders i.e. agevans were trained to identify issues related to urban infrastructure service provisioning and land tenure. The community, through an interactive process, identified some key infrastructural issues within the block, all reflecting poor infrastructure delivery. Within B Block Jahangirpuri, the drains weren't properly built and therefore often get clogged, the waste collection system is irregular thus compounding the sanitation problem and the drinking water supply has been reported to be inadequate and contaminated, from both the source as well as the means of access for the local community. Once these issues were identified, the agevans conducted an awareness drive in the settlement with the objective of educating (and in turn, mobilising) the female residents of their land entitlements and the corresponding service delivery agencies, including basic understanding of urban governance.

Discussions with the community reveal that the modalities of achieving improved infrastructure services was an important tool of information disseminated during the awareness raising sessions. "We realised we didn't know who to approach for this waterlogged lane", said a group of women residents in a lane in B Block. "When Saira ben invited us for the mohalla meeting and distributed the pamphlets, we learnt that MCD is responsible for cleaning up the drains...we have discovered a new founded opportunity to reach out to the Ward Councillor<sup>2</sup> to air our concerns" (Saira ben is one of the agevans trained under the land rights programme and lives in a different lane in the block). The women shared their fear of diseases from the drain water, especially for their children. Getting the drains cleaned up was a top priority. In December 2019, Saira ben on the request of the women residents wrote an application on behalf of the women residents to the Ward Councillor of the municipal body of north Delhi outlining the gaps in service delivery in the lane and how that has affected the residents. The application was annexed with signatures of 80 women from the lane. 14 of them were accompanied by Saira

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<sup>1</sup> Now an autonomous institution called Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB).

<sup>2</sup> the local elected representative at the city level

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ben and other field workers to the Councillor's office to register their grievance. The Councillor has been previously approached by SEWA's field staff during the situational analysis conducted in July 2019 to learn more about the municipal body's functions and suggestions on improving the state of service delivery in the area. Some agevans and field members have also on separate occasions visited the Councillor's office to make enquiries. Bas himmat karo aur chalo", recounts 50 years old Israt, as she spoke to the women in her neighbourhood and motivated their spirit of getting things done. A few days after the visit to the Councilor, sanitation workers had arrived in the area and spent hours cleaning the clogged drains and clearing the lane of the stagnant water. Two months later, the lane was still clean. The women claim they will promptly visit the authorities if the problem reoccurs. "Our children can now safely play outside", exclaimed most of the women.

Salma Naz was in the group of women who had visited the Councillor. She has lived in Jahangirpuri for the last 19 years since she moved to Delhi from the neighbouring state of Uttar Pradesh. She runs a small tailoring business from her house. She is hesitant to call her work a 'business'. "I stitch blouses for the women in my neighbourhood, it is not something I do every day". She is a home-based worker like most of the women in her neighbourhood. The small earnings she makes for herself helps her buy things for herself and her children. However, work is irregular, and often secondary to their domestic responsibilities. "I used to spend at least half an hour every day cleaning up the dirty water that would enter my house", recalls Salma. This was not the first visit Salma has made to the Councillor. On previous occasions, she had gone to the office to get her identity card and labour card issued. However, the December visit was



the first instance she had stepped out to address a problem that affected the entire community. "I want to continue to be gainfully self-employed, but I want to work from home, maybe get into the 'exports' business", suggests Salma.

Salma and the other women were accompanied by Saira ben (see image on the left), the agevan in the area. She evolved as a community leader for SEWA only in the past three years but her connection with SEWA is older. Her daughter used to attend the skills classes at the local outreach centers<sup>3</sup> run by SEWA in Jahangirpuri. Saira was skilled at embroidery, but with age she has left that work. "I feel satisfied with doing something for the women of my community, in fact for the whole community. The lanes are clean now. Everyone has noticed". Saira has

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<sup>3</sup> SEWA Shakti Kendras



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planned her next step - she will mobilise the women now to take a stand against the undrinkable water supply in their homes. Each family in the area buys bottled water every alternate day for drinking and cooking purposes. The families no longer want to spend the extra money on the water. On being asked to name the authority which is responsible for water supply in Delhi, one woman answered correctly, “Dilli Jal Board<sup>4</sup>”. It was Nazmeen, a young mother of two infants who knew the answer. When asked about it, she said she learnt about the different local authorities from the pamphlet she received during the awareness meeting in her area.



“We will all go to the Jal Board to talk about the water problem, we will carry bottles of this dirty water to show them what they supply us to drink”, said all women present in the group. One could sense their excitement - they had realised the small victory their efforts had awarded them with, and to their families. A few women gleamed with pride, “our children and husbands appreciated what we had done for the area”.

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<sup>4</sup> Delhi Water Board