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Sponsoring Agency: Humara Bachpan Campaign

Location: Delhi, India

“I know that real progress will be slow. There remain several challenges to making meaningful improvements in impoverished urban areas in India. But it’s encouraging and awe-inspiring to know that there are so many young kids who are eager to learn about and get involved in this complex political process.”

Across India, large scale migrations into urban areas have led to the emergence of numerous slums and settlements that lack basic amenities like water, electricity and working sewage systems. Improving living conditions in these locations can be a challenge, especially if planners and policy makers are not fully aware of the complex relationships between residents and their environments.



This summer, I had the opportunity to work with *Humara Bachpan*, an NGO that is very conscious of the need for inclusive and informed community planning. They work to involve those stakeholders who are generally left out of the decision making process, but who are often the most acutely affected by the results – slum children.

Humara Bachpan facilitates participatory planning meetings for children and community leaders in slums across Delhi, while also educating them about urban renewal policies in Indian cities. Further, they help children and other members of the slums advocate for their needs to local government officials and urban planners.

During my internship, I spent time working with four different slum communities in the city. Each slum had its unique environmental and socio-economic challenges. For instance one was campaigning to cover up an open sewage line that was posing health and safety hazards. Another community was

recently relocated to the outskirts of the city where they were disconnected from normal municipal services and struggled to get regular access to drinking water.

Part of my work involved documenting these problems by writing up “slum profiles” and reports on the local planning meetings. Sometimes, this involved digging through the National Archives to find information on historic slum relocation programs, census



data from previous years and old land ownership maps. Not all data was readily accessible, and my team often had to file requests to the government under the “Right To Information Act.” But there were many bureaucratic challenges inherent to this process as well. And I was beginning to appreciate the difficulties of creating a truly inclusive urban planning process in the face of such information asymmetries.

Another interesting project involved working with the children to collect geospatial data for "social maps" of their neighborhoods. We photographed spaces that are important to the children but need improvement (eg. broken community toilets, poorly maintained playgrounds, open garbage dumps), geotagged these images, and asked the children to answer some survey questions related to each location. The goal is to present the database of information to urban planners and policy makers, in order to encourage them to include child-friendly environmental components into local development plans.

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