Transforming M Ward:
Leveraging Knowledge for Social Transformation

The M-East ward, one of the twenty four administrative divisions of Mumbai and home to over 8,07,720 (Census 2011) residents, is also one of the poorest areas in the city with more than 72% living in slums. The ward comprises of more than 256 slums and 13 large resettlement colonies. Its human development index is the lowest in the city representing a high infant mortality rate, a high number of out-of-school children between the ages of 6 to 14 years, and more than 50 percent children malnourished (HDR, 2009). The child malnutrition levels in the area, have been equated to Sub-Saharan Africa and a life that is full of poverty, insecurity and everyday violence. The ward is thus symptomatic of the paradoxes of urban development in the country and its problems are linked to the secondary citizenship of urban poor, the lack of official recognition of life, the lack of data and knowledge about several processes at work and patchy solutions that lack accountability and adequate resource support.

The M Ward is also the immediate neighbourhood of TISS; students and faculty of TISS have used the ward as a teaching and experience base for several decades. TISS, on the occasion of its Platinum Jubilee year- 2011 initiated a project that hopes to fulfill its social obligation to the people of the ward by generating knowledge and using it to build strategic partnerships for transformation of the human development conditions in the ward. The project is an opportunity to demonstrate as a model, inclusive urban planning and development including agency of communities based on empowerment, effective generation of knowledge and transformational leadership.

KEY STRATEGIES

Lending Visibility to the ‘Invisible’: The project started with a slum enumeration of 1,12,347 slums in the ward and a socio economic survey covering 20,526 households, done studies on maternal health systems, inquiries into circumstances of maternal deaths, assessed child-friendliness of schools and communities, conducted need assessments in resettlement colonies among others. The learnings from these studies have been immense and have fed into several efforts of transformation.

Creating a Shared Vision and Ownership: The project initiated the M-Ward Convenor forum, a collective of members of the community and the M-Ward project staff which has jointly formulated the agenda for transformation of the ward.

Empowering Communities and Developing Leadership: The M-Ward Convenor forum equipped with information generated by the project has participated in advocacy initiatives to further the goals of the project.

Creating an Enabling Environment and Advocacy and Communication and Enabling Equitable Access to Government Programmes and Schemes: M-Ward Convenor Forum and community members have been in dialogue with the government, actively participated in monitoring and influencing government programs being implemented in the ward.

Creating Partnerships to Generate Measurable Results: The project has successfully mediated to create partnerships between the community and government agencies, with people negotiating with MCGM, State Government and CSR to further the agenda of transformation.