

# **National Urban Workshop on improving Living Environment and Health Condition of the Low Income Families in Urban Settlements, held from 21<sup>st</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> October 2004**

by the Janarukula

## ***Background***

Women's Development Bank Federation (WDBF) which was promoted on 10<sup>th</sup> February 1998 carried out its saving and credit programs covering both urban and poor families living in several districts in Sri Lanka. Under this program 5 to 10 women were brought into one cohesive mutual help group. Every week every member saves Rs.5 in these groups. These saving are used to provide small loans to these members to meet their emergencies. Several groups in a settlement get together for solidarity purpose and form an entity called a Primary Society. These primary societies again federate at zonal level to form the Zonal Societies and at District Societies. WDBF is the Apex entity at national level to institutionalize and to coordinate all these women's groups.

The national conventions of the WDBF held in 1999 and 2003 proved how strongly that these Women's Groups spread in urban settlements and rural hamlets in Sri Lanka, have come to be a reinforcing mechanism to address the issues of both rural and urban poor.

Although WDBF is an endeavor of the poor to improve their own living condition **by mobilizing their own resources**, later it realized the importance of working in partnership with the other government and local government actors engaged in improving the living conditions of the people in various spheres. Accordingly WDBF at local level joined hands with respective Local Authorities, Grama Nildhharis, (Village level government officer) Public Health Inspectors, Officers of Agricultural and Agrarian Services Departments, and made use of their expertise in implementing its programs, such as promoting lavatory facilities, obtaining land clearance, and providing cultivation loans etc for improving conditions of the low income settlements in both rural and urban areas.

This partnership approach, brought dividends to all the parties concern. For Local Authorities and other government officers, the Women Development Bank Federation became a vehicle to take their programs to real target groups. For WDBF, The officers in Local Authorities, Grama Niladharies, Public Health Inspectors and other various officers operating at community and village levels provided skills and expertise that the WDBF was not possessing to implement its saving and credit based poverty alleviation programs.

In urban settlements this was clearly visible. Issues relating to housing, toilet facilities and other common amenities have been identified. Accordingly the federation is in operation in urban areas as indicated below:

	<b>Name of Local Authority</b>	<b>No. of Settlements</b>	<b>No. of Members</b>
<b>MUNICIPAL COUNCILS</b>			
1	Colombo	32	2133
2	Gampaha	12	432
3	Kandy	07	1016
4	Anuradhapura	10	365
5	Kurunegala	08	302
6	Rathnapura	10	456
7	Moratuwa	10	439
8	Negombo	06	205
9	Nuwara Eliya	07	258
10	Matale	03	180
<b>URBAN COUNCILS</b>			
11	Peliyagoda	14	597
12	Chilaw	05	170
13	Puttalam	04	142
14	Kuliyapitiya	04	139
15	Kegalle	03	107
16	Kadugannawa	02	105
17	Kalutara	03	129
	<b>Total</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>7175</b>

Out of the above 17 Local Authorities, the Federation decided to prepare and implement a Development program within the following 5 Local Authority areas, taking into consideration the strength of the WDBF activities now in operation within these Local Authority areas.

The local level WDBF in these areas provided the leadership for the preparation of this development program. Federation decided to do this in partnership with the Local Authorities and other public institutions. This workshop was organized to achieve this objective.

### **National Workshop on urban Development**

‘ The National Workshop on improving Living Environment and Health Condition of the Low Income Families in Urban Settlements’ was the theme of the workshop. It has been decided to hold the national convention based on the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations Development Program from 21 to 25 October. Information relating to Local Authorities was collected by the respective local level women leaders of the Federation.

## Participation

	<b>Local Authority Area and Other</b>	<b>Institution</b>	<b>No. of Participants</b>
01	<b>Colombo Municipal Council</b>	Women's Development Bank Federation, Colombo	10
		Colombo Municipal Council	02
02	<b>Kurunagala Municipal Council</b>	Women's Development Bank Federation, Kurunagala	08
		Kurunagala Municipal Council	02
03	<b>Gampaha Municipal Council</b>	Women's Development Bank Federation, Gampaha	08
		Gampaha Municipal Council	02
04	<b>Kandy Municipal Council</b>	Women's Development Bank Federation, Kandy	08
		Kandy Municipal Council	02
05	<b>Peliyagoda Urban Council</b>	Women's Development Bank Federation, Peliyagoda	08
		Paliyagoda Urban Council	02
06	<b>Government Office</b>	Housing Ministry	02
		National Housing Development Authority	03
		National Water Supply & Drainage Board	01
		Sri Lanka Land Reclamation & development Corporation	02
		Ministry of Urban Development	02
07	<b>National Federation</b>	Women's Development Bank Federation	06
08	<b>NGO</b>	Janarukula	03
		<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>

## Activities of the Workshop

The Chief Guest on the opening day of the workshop was His Workshop the Colombo MATOR Prassanna Gunawardene. In his address to the gathering he pointed out the various municipal works that can be performed in partnership with the Women's Development Banks Federation. He cited Ibbagewatta settlement activities that were performed in partnership with the WDBF as a good example. In conclusion he said that he is eagerly awaiting the proposals from the workshop to implement some innovative programs.

At the first session held after the inaugural meeting various problems affecting different settlements were identified. The second day was scheduled for the field visits to get the identified problems confirmed and explore the ways and means of formulating plans of actions to address the problems identified.

## ***Second Day – Field Visit***

### **Ibbagewatta Settlement**

The second day was the field visit day to Ibbagewaththa settlement. Ibbagewaththa is a low income settlement situated in the district No. 1 within the Colombo Municipal Council areas. In August 2002, the Municipal council has introduced the WDBF programs to this settlement. Accordingly the women in this settlement are engaged in saving and credit activities.

In this settlement there are 450 houses. All are unauthorized constructions. Ninety percent are shanties. There is one public toilet and three common stand pipes for the entire settlement. Inhabitants are exposed to various diseases and epidemics due to the lack of sanitary and health facilities and common amenities. As these settlers have encroached in to canal reservations they do not have any land tenures.

### **The Activities of the Women Development Banking Federation**

The women in Ibbagewaththa were mobilized into saving and credit groups by the WDBF. In addition to the engagement in savings and credit programs these groups have become solidarity groups for these women to meet weekly and discuss the problems that they have to face. One of the important issues that have surfaced due these group interactions was the drainage problem that they were experiencing. There is no proper drainage system within the settlement. On rainy days all waste water in the settlements are flowing through the houses. This problem has been discussed within groups and brought to the notice of the Janarukula and the Colombo Municipal Council. Accordingly at a discussion headed by the Mayor with the participation of Janarukula and WDBF a decision was taken to construct drains by the WDBF with the participation of the community. The Municipal Council undertook to provide three culverts to the settlement. Accordingly the WDBF with financial support of the SDI , could spend Rs. 23548/= for the construction of drains. The community contributed Rs. 5700/= in cash and the labor, free of charge. When the construction work on drains was completed, the Municipal Council too has completed the construction of the three culverts that is has promised.

### **Poranukotuwaththa Settlement**

This is a low income settlement within the Peliyagoda Urban Council areas, situated closer to Colombo Municipal Council boundary. It consists of 143 houses, mainly shanties to provide accommodation for 404 families with a total population of nearly 1600. All houses are in unauthorized constructions in a land belonging to the Urban Development Authority. Lack of common amenities including toilet facilities are the general problems that the community in this settlement have to face. The savings and credit program of the Women's Development Bank

Federation has been introduced to this settlement in the year 2000 by the Peliyagoda Urban Council.

### **Activities of the Women's Development Bank Federation**

In the year 2003, the women in Poranukotuwaththa settlement have promoted a Primary branch federating its own women's groups for solidarity purposes, under the umbrella of WDBF. This primary society is managed by a committee selected from the leaders of the women's groups. Thus it has paved the way to promote leadership skills among the women in the settlements. This primary society is actively engaged in mobilizing savings from members and also from non-members to meet their social and economic needs. Thus it has become popular organization within the settlement.

The primary society did not confine only to the savings and credit programs. It has focused its attention on the other common problems that the community in the settlement has to face. According to its findings one of the most acute problems that the community in this settlement is facing is the toilet problem. They do not have individual toilets. The public toilet that the Peliyagoda Urban Council has constructed for this settlement has been dilapidated and has become unusable. To satisfy their daily private needs they have to go the public toilet in another settlement on the other side of the Colombo - Negombo main road. Being a busiest road with heavy traffic it has become a tedious task for them to cross the road to answer their natural compulsion. The primary society took the initiative to solve this problem.

In January a meeting was convened headed by the Chairman, Peliyagoda Urban Council with the participation of Janarukula and WDBF. At this meeting the following decisions were taken

- 1) As the land on which the lavatory to be constructed is owned by the Urban Development Authority, clearance for the land should be obtained by the WDBF from the Urban Development Authority.
- 2) The building material for the lavatory construction will be provided by the WDBF. The cost of labor should be born by the Poranukotuwaththa community.
- 3) Peliyagoda Urban Council undertook to provide electricity and water supply and the maintenance of the lavatory.

This project was carried on with the complete participation of the community at all levels. As such the community could plan the lavatory with an upstairs to use the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor as the office of its branch office. As all the parties concern have duly performed the tasks that they have undertaken, the lavatory could be opened on the field visit day of this workshop. The participants of the field visit could observe how the community has made use of the lavatory as a part and parcel of the community movement. This was a novel experience.

### **The cost of the toilet project has been met as follows.**

Financial contribution by the Poranukotuwawaththa community = Rs.50,500 Women's Development Banking Federation (Grants from (SDI) = Rs.250,500 ( US\$ 2505)

In addition to the above financial cost directly born by the community and Women's Development Banking Federation, the community also has provided the required labor free of charge. The Primary Society has undertaken to maintain the toilet by employing a laborer. Every member has agreed to contribute Rs.5 per month to meet these labor payments.

Peliyagoda Urban Council has provided electricity and water serviced for toilet at its own expense in addition to employing conservancy laborers for cleaning and routine maintenances.

### **Elugala Settlement**

Elugala is a low income settlement in Kurunegala Municipal council areas. The meaning of Elugala is a rock where goats have lied down. Kurunegala is a town famous for having large rocks around it. Elugala is one of these rocks and it has been a human settlement for over 40 years.

Now 160 families with a total population of 585 people live in 132 houses in Elugala. Out of these 132 houses, 50 are permanent, 18 are semi-permanent, while the balance 64 houses are of temporary nature.

According to the number of rooms available per house, houses can be classifies as follows;

No. of Rooms	No. of Houses
1	11
2	61
Above 2	60

Only 22 houses have individual toilets. The balance 110 has no toilets.

According to the National Housing Development Authority this rock is an important scenic feature for the town and not fit for human settlement. It has to be preserved free of human settlements. This was a threatening situation for the land tenure of the inhabitants of this rock. They took up of this matter with their Primary Bank branch of WDBF.

WDBF has acquired sufficient experience about similar problems from the Bombay National Slum Dwellers Federation. Mrs.Swarnalatha Menike of this settlement also has has the opportunity in acquiring this experience.

Under this situation the women leaders in the settlement has done a house survey covering entire settlement. Information about all houses and householders has been collected and photographed. Equipped with this information, under the guidance of the Janarukula and with

the support of the WDBF a discussion had been held to discuss the land issues of the Elugala settlers. This discussion was chaired by the Chairman, NHDA. At this discussion a decision has been arrived at, to survey all entire rock areas and prepare a plan for these houses. This has to done by the NHDA. Accordingly the officers of the NHDA visited the settlement to issue housing cards to the settlers now in occupation. But due to the inaccuracy of the information available with the officers of the NHDA confusion was created. However by this time as the women leaders have has the up to date data that they have collected by their survey they could assist the officers to clear their confusion to issue these householders cards. A lesson that taught by this exercise was that if the community is equipped with the accurate information about their own problems it will help in large measures to solve their own problems.

Under the field visit the participants got an opportunity to evaluate this true participatory concept of planning.

### **Mahayyawa Settlement**

This is a settlement in the Kandy Municipal Council areas with a population of 3538 people. The number of houses available is only 618, for 853 families.

In February 2003, WDBF could reach this settlement to bring 433 women; 311 as members and 122 as associated members into its savings and credit program.

### **Particulars of Savings and Credit**

<b>Particulars of Deposits</b>	<b>Amount-Rupees</b>
Shares	85,400
Compulsory Savings	14,285
Members Deposits	33,280
Non-member Deposits	15,200
Group Deposit	2,770
Welfare Fund	9,580
Children Deposit	21,640
<b>Total Deposits</b>	<b>182,260</b>
Total Loans Granted	206,500
Loan recoveries	101,500
Loan Balance	105,000
Service Charge Income	9,585

### ***Third Day of the Urban Workshop***

This day was devoted to list and prioritize the issues identified and explore the funding sources

The major Problems Identified:

1. Problems of Land Tenure
2. Problems relating to Improving Houses
3. Shortage of Toilets
4. Difficulty in obtaining Potable Water
5. Lack of proper Drainage and Sewerage System
6. Solid Waste Problem

The respective officers of the urban local authorities and the community leaders were grouped to design action plans to solve these problems. The foreign delegates from India, Thailand, South Africa and Malawi who participated for this work shop also were included into these groups to provide an opportunity to these groups to learn from the experiences that have had in their respective countries.

The key objective of this group exercise was to map out the strategies to solve the problems that they have identified so that they can be presented to Honorable Ministers, Mayors and the Government Officers at the conclusion ceremony on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of the workshop scheduled to hold on 24<sup>th</sup>.

#### ***Fourth Day of the Urban Workshop***

Fourth day of the Urban Workshop was a crucial day. The conclusion ceremony on this day was used as a platform to voice the grievances of the urban poor before the relevant authorities and open a dialogue to find solution for them. Venue selected for this event is one of the most strategic halls available in Colombo; “Nawa Rangahala Of the Royal College”. More than 500 urban poor women congregated to hall and took their places in the balcony, stage corridors halls and wherever space was available to show their strengths and solidarity to find redress for their burning problems.

The distinguished participants for this presentation ceremony included the following;

1. Honorable Minister of Urban Development and Water Supply Dinesh Gunewardena
2. His worship the Mayor of Colombo Prasanna Gunewardena
3. His worship the Mayor Gampaha Ajith Mannapperuma
4. The Chairmen of various Public Institutions, Secretaries, Municipal Commissioners and Ministry Secretaries

A part of the speech made by Hon. Dinesh Gunewardena at this meeting is quoted below.

“I visited Poranukotuwiththa low income settlement in the Peliyagoda Urban Council area and could see the public toilet that has been constructed in this settlement by the Women’s



Development Bank Federation. They have made use of the concrete slab over the toilet to construct their zonal office over it. Similar types of innovative activities are not adopted by the government institutions. Therefore I wish to introduce this program to all towns coming under my ministry so that they may build up a partnership for urban development. Similarly action will be taken to address the drinking water problem in the country in partnership with the Women's Development Banks Federation”

Mr. Jhokim Arputham, President of the Slum Dwellers International (SDI) addressed the meeting appreciating the activities of the Women's Development Banks Federation and comparing them with the programs adopted by the slum dwellers in Asian and African countries to solve their problems.

The proposals developed in this three day workshop were presented by the women leaders of the respective urban local authority areas to this meeting. The following activities were also decided to be carried out in the ensuing year.

1. To construct 100 houses, in the first stage, by the Women's Development Banks Federation with the participation of the community and in partnership with the Urban Development Authority, National Housing Development Authority and the Colombo Municipal Council for the shanty dwellers, who are subject to frequent floods and various hazards in the Ibbagewaththa settlement, in District No.1 of the Colombo Municipality.
2. The settlers in Elugala settlement in the Kurunegala Municipality are facing severe problems with respect of the toilet and drainage facilities. Therefore to commence construction of individual toilets for the houses, and for providing drainage for houses and drainage and sewerage system for the settlement by the Women's Development Banking Federation in partnership with the Urban Development Authority, National Housing Development Authority and Kurunegala Municipal Council.
3. Commence a housing project to construct 45 houses for “Maduru Layma” settlement in Kurunegala M.C
4. Decision to launch a solid waste management program within the Gampaha Municipal Council areas by the WDBF together with the Gampaha Municipal Council and the Central Environment Authority.
5. Decision to commence a housing program at Mahayyawa in the Kandy Municipal Council area.

6. Rehabilitate the drainage system in the 5 settlements, within the Municipal Council area of Peliyagoda in which the Women's Development Banks Federation is active.

The above are the main programs that were included in the developments plan of the Women's Development Banks Federation for 2004/2005. At the time of preparation of this report WDBF has been informed by the SELAVIP and the IIED that they have allocated US\$ 50,000 for development in Ibbagewaththa and Sterling Pounds 9000 for Elugala respectively. The preliminary development activities of these projects have been already commenced.

This urban development workshop had been successful to give the message to the Government and the Local Authority that the community development problems can be best solved by the community themselves. For that they should organize themselves and play the leading role.

WDBF would like to extend its gratitude and thanks to the SDI for providing financial support required for successfully conducting this workshop and also for facilitating the participation of foreign delegates for the workshop.

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