URBAN RENEWAL BY CITIZENS

The spread of unauthorized construction in our cities has assumed significant proportions. It is estimated that in Delhi, the population resident in unauthorized colonies is about 4 million.

Recently the Delhi Government issued ‘provisional regularization’ certificates to about 1400 of the unauthorized colonies, and started the process of redevelopment / renewal to bring these into the urban mainstream. However, the morphology and the urban structure of these colonies is different from the ‘greenfield’ development guided by the Delhi Master Plan.

A new paradigm is required to address and resolve the complex set of environmental, cultural, and legal issues arising from this ‘spontaneous’ development.

One such provisionally regularized unauthorized colony is Aya Nagar, situated in South-West Delhi, on the Mehrauli-Gurgaon Road, adjacent to the Delhi-Haryana border.

Steps in the process of urban renewal by citizens,

Survey and diagnosis of existing habitat, the existing framework of governance and implementation policies for urban renewal.

Demonstrate alternative approaches by empowering citizens towards urban improvements which can be citizen-managed and maintained at the neighbourhood level.

Create partnerships between citizens and state government agencies, and develop a policy framework for the institution of local self governance.
The project began with the formation of a community organisation registered for development action in co-operation with the State government. As a first task the various sub-community groups entered into a dialogue and prepared a list of development needs.

The priority areas for development initiatives in Aya Nagar are:
- Public health - Proper functioning drainage and water supply systems, including rain water harvesting.
- Revitalization of the Johar (central reservoir) and landscape development to become the main community public space - an Eco Park.
- Safety in mobility - better roads, decongestion of traffic and increased bus service with a proper terminal.
- Improved electric supply.
- Community facilities like a baraat ghar / community centre.
- Government health care facilities like clinics / hospitals and veterinary Services.
- Improvements in the condition of existing schools.
- Higher education facilities, especially for girls.
- Sports centre for the youth.

To enhance dialogue and focus the interest of the citizens on the development potential, relevant information is shared with all, by means of a website and posters distributed with daily newspapers throughout the settlement.

The information campaign is designed to raise resources, both human and financial.

All sections of the diverse community of Aya Nagar agreed on the primary developmental requirement being drainage (public health)

The first demonstration (sub) project is for solid waste management and in-situ sewerage and drainage provision in one neighbourhood, Ghoda Mohalla; by making primary treatment of sewerage available at the nearest public space, which is the inner street, with waste water and treated effluent carried in sub-grade pipes by gravity to the Johar (central reservoir) through a reed bed for secondary treatment. The treated water becomes a resource for the community.

The citizens of Aya Nagar have migrated from all parts of India, making this settlement virtually a microcosm of the whole country. The urban morphology of Aya Nagar is typical of growing Indian cities.

Critically recording the process of development here becomes an opportunity to learn first hand about restructuring urban space for benefit of the majority.