



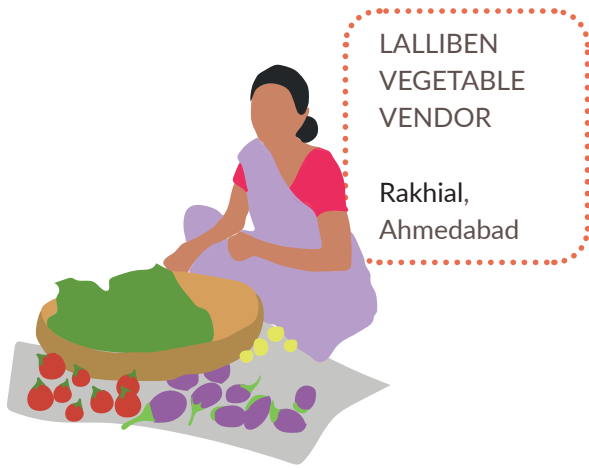
Improve women's mobility and their access to jobs and markets

CONTEXT

Safe, convenient, and affordable transport is vital for women to not only help them access schools and jobs but also facilitate their access to social and economic opportunities. For low-income settlements located away from city centers, transportation services are expensive, inconvenient, and sometimes even non-existent. This limits women's choices of work location and the type of work undertaken. They often end up accepting low paying jobs closer to their work or home-based work supplied by local contractors. Women pay much greater social and economic costs of transport deficits as it limits both their social and livelihood activities.

Although home-based workers spend a majority of their time working indoors, they are not home-bound for their work. They need to be connected to city networks

and their suppliers, contractors, and markets. They need affordable and accessible transport services. For instance, in a focus group study conducted by Mahila Housing SEWA Trust (MHT) in Ahmedabad, women home-based workers pointed out that they travel for work at least once in three days. Inadequate public transport means that women find it difficult to go to the contractor to fetch the raw materials to work at home (Mahadevia et al., 2014). It increases their transport cost and decreases their work orders, disrupting their livelihood activities. When reliable and affordable modes of transportation are unavailable, home-based workers depend on middlemen or subcontractors to undertake the collection and delivery of their products. In Ahmedabad, walking is the women's preferred choice of transport for shorter trips. For longer commutes, they rely more on para-transit like auto-rickshaws rather than



“ My day starts at five in the morning. I walk for fifteen to twenty minutes and then catch an auto-rickshaw to Jamalpur, where I spend two hours buying vegetables. It takes me another half an hour to reach Usmanpura, where I set up the vegetables to sell. I have to pay as high as INR 80 to INR 100 (USD 1 to USD 1.30) on a rickshaw every day! ”

public buses (Ahmedabad FG study). A substantial amount of their daily earnings is spent on transport, increasing their financial burden. Even when public transport is available in the city, it is not often safe for regular journeys. Women are nervous about traveling alone to distant places and navigating multiple transport systems. The options available to women from slum communities are exceptionally tedious and inconvenient.

MHT'S APPROACH

On completing twenty-five years since its inception, MHT went back to its primary stakeholders to assess areas where they could assist in making neighborhoods and cities safer and more accessible for women from poor communities. The need for safe, accessible, affordable, and reliable transport emerged as a key factor for women, especially home-based workers, to undertake their livelihood and household activities productively. One of the key strategies that MHT employs is to train women leaders to use spatial data to identify and articulate their issues and make demands of the government. With MHT's success to solve issues at the grassroots level, their action is now centered around building on these community-level measures and translating them to city-level context. MHT has joined hands with urban think tanks, other NGOs,

and advocacy groups to understand and advocate for efficient, reliable, and affordable transport systems that improve women's mobility and enhance their access to jobs and markets.

Promoting safer streets

Streets constitute a majority of the public realm in slums. Other than acting as access and infrastructure conduits, they trigger economic and social activity within communities.

Well paved roads with adequate infrastructure like street lights and stormwater drainage foster more usage and social interactions among residents with positive impacts on the sense of public safety. MHT's on-ground experience has also shown that paved, well-lit streets within informal settlements reduce the proliferation of illicit business and illegal activities to a great extent. Upgrading street infrastructure was a key component of the Parivartan Slum Networking Program (SNP) implemented by MHT in partnership with the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC). The program had widespread impacts on women's mobility and has improved their quality of life, psychological well-being, and community relationships (Rusling, 2010). The SNP program was discontinued after 2008. Over the years, MHT has played a pivotal role in training and empowering women to make demands and leverage funds from their local councilors to implement street improvements like paved pathways, adequate street lighting, and tree plantation.

At the city level, MHT is working in partnership with advocacy networks to facilitate a secure and accessible environment for women in the public realm. MHT is a partner in the Road Safety Network that aims to build citizen awareness in Gujarat and Maharashtra. They highlight the needs of women from low-income communities and work to garner support for important road safety principles.

Building capacity of grassroots women in evidence-based advocacy

Communities have valuable local knowledge and experiences that can contribute to the formulation and implementation of policies, programs, and infrastructure more responsive to their needs. Communicating this knowledge using the right data and evidence is critical to getting the attention of public authorities and holding them accountable to act on it. MHT builds the capacity of women's groups from slum settlements to advocate

Training women's groups in evidence-based advocacy for expanding bus services Odhav, Ahmedabad



The Odhav industrial area comprises several slum settlements housing a population of twenty-five thousand to thirty thousand. Despite this higher concentration of people, the area is poorly connected with public transport. The Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) stops are approximately a kilometer away, with no buses covering any internal streets closer to the slums. Residents have to walk to the stop or take a special auto-rickshaw which proves expensive. Lack of connectivity is particularly challenging for home-based workers who have to walk a long distance with raw materials and finished goods, often in extreme heat conditions. Being an industrial area with a lot of trucking activity, the streets are unsafe for women during nighttime, and women often face incidents of theft, eve-teasing, and harassment.

In 2018, MHT mobilized the Community Action Groups (CAGs) of these slum settlements to come together and start a dialogue with the Ahmedabad Municipal Transport Service (AMTS). Women learned to read aerial imagery and conduct household and GPS-based surveys. They mapped the current route and bus stops of the AMTS service, to demonstrate issues of inaccessibility and inadequate safety and security. They delineated the walking distance and time taken for residents from fifteen slums in the Odhav area to reach the bus stops. Technical experts from MHT assisted them to propose a route that catered to their locality. The women have submitted their data and spatial analysis to AMTS, outlining the problems with mobility and the proposed solutions. MHT supported the women to follow up with the AMTS officers and facilitate their visits to the area. AMTS has recognized the problem and has assured prompt action.

“I am impressed by the women leaders and how well they used spatial data and maps to highlight the problem of inadequate bus service in this part of Odhav. We have carried out a survey of the area and are evaluating locations for new stops.”

JITENDRA MEHTA, OFFICER-AMTS

with concerned authorities for safe and reliable transport using data and evidence and formulate solutions that respond to their local context. For example, in the Odhav area of Ahmedabad, MHT has helped residents of slum settlements to work with spatial data and maps to start a dialogue to expand public bus service (Box 1). This is anticipated to improve the livelihood of the residents, who otherwise have to resort to walking or using auto-rickshaws to even reach the nearest BRTS bus stop.

Advancing the agenda of equitable mobility in cities

MHT plays a key role in representing the voices of low-income communities in city-level plans and policies. They understand the travel patterns of the urban poor and engage with city forums to bring out the issues that are unique to them with respect to accessibility, reliability, and safety of daily commute. For instance, MHT, as a part of the Main Bhi Dilli (MBD) campaign, is supporting the cause to make Delhi more representative and inclusive by engaging with citizens in the 2041 Master Plan process. One of the key proposals advanced by the MBD is to integrate land use and transport, in order to improve the connectivity of transit networks. They have proposed a multi-modal integration of public transport in core city locations and provision of basic amenities for the commuters. Additionally, the proposal also outlines the need to enhance the institutional capacity between different departments responsible for transport (Main Bhi Dilli, 2020). As part of the campaign, MHT is working to bring to light mobility issues in “resettlement colonies” that are located in peripheries and are disconnected from the city due to the absence of any road and transport networks.

LEARNING AND DIRECTION OF FURTHER ADVOCACY

1) Grassroots women can influence impactful change when equipped with the ability to propose solutions from data collected at the local level. To improve habitat conditions and access to services in low-income settlements the focus should be on bridging the data gap that exists across Indian cities. The absence of data has constrained the ability to formulate sound urban transport plans that respond to the specific needs and demands of the city (Bhatt et al., 2013). Empowering women and grassroots actors to resolve this gap will make local-level information readily accessible, and form a reliable foundation for evidence-based solutions.

2) The relocation of urban poor to city outskirts, common in cities across India, significantly hampers their mobility, work, and livelihoods (Brief CS2). Relocated communities also often find themselves at a disadvantage and cut off from their social networks and recreational, and educational opportunities affecting their overall well-being. If at all, relocation should be based on consensus between governing bodies and communities, and be supported with connected road networks and affordable transport.

3) There is a growing body of evidence on gender gaps in urban mobility. Navigating the city itself provides for different experiences for women and men. Insecurity and the fear of harassment and sexual violence when using public transport is a key factor that limits the everyday movement of women and girls. Also frequency of service, fare policy, design of infrastructure, all impact mobility of women. Policy advocacy on these issues will require multi-stakeholder partnerships that bring different actors such as civil society, technical and research groups, and the State for sharing data, resources, experiences, and best practices.

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