

A success story of housewives

The five day Global Assembly of Women and the Environment, which met in Miami, Florida last November ended with the demand — the global resolution of environmental problems requires the active involvement of women from the grass-root to policy-making positions in government, funding agencies and private industry.

Success stories on four global environmental issues — water, waste, energy as it relates to climate changes, and environmentally friendly system, technologies and products collected from five major regions of the world — Africa, Asia/Pacific, Europe, Latin America/Caribbean and North America were presented at the Assembly. The selected projects primarily came from the grass-roots.

The Assembly was convened under the auspices of the Senior Women's Advisory Group on Sustainable Development (SWAGSD) of the United Nations' Environment Programme (UNEP). One of the Assembly goals was to demonstrate to the world, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the UNEP, women's capacity and commitment to environmental management.

More than 500 people mostly women from 70 countries gathered to share the experience of 218 women environmentalists working at the grassroots.

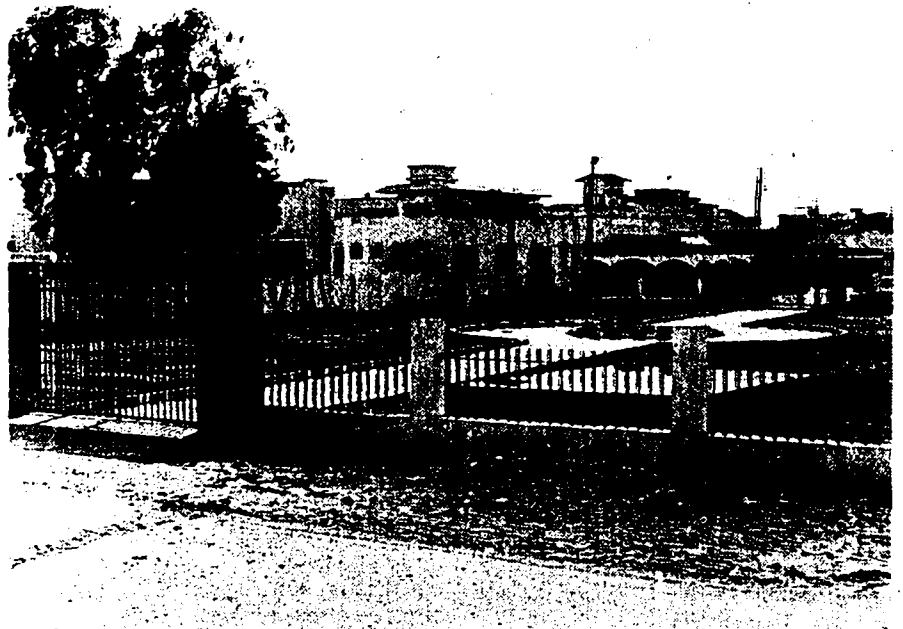
These women have designed smokeless stoves, solar cookers and green houses. They have "reformed" local and national sewer systems, damned dams which would erode fertile soil and lead mercury into people's drinking water, halted highway construction which

threatened flooding and forced multinational food companies to fish for tuna without massacring dolphins.

They have also recycled highly toxic used motor oil, obliged powerful industrial concerns to reduce scandalously high levels of lead and cadmium in their emissions, altered farming methods and successfully cultivated degraded lands given up for lost by men, according to a report published by the Assembly Coordinator. The experiences of these women were

at the Assembly in the area of "waste" from Asia/Pacific region was titled, KAWWS — Women's Group in Pakistan uses Collective Action and self-help to Transform their urban community.

A story of ordinary middle-class housewives who demanded, fought for, and succeeded in getting basic civic services such as roads, street lights, regular garbage collection and disposal, replacement of broken sewerage and water lines, parks and play grounds, anti-



Underconstruction Quba park saved from unlawful commercialisation.

"success stories" usually against extraordinary obstacles and sometimes physical intimidation.

One of the success stories presented

malaria fumigation, and anti-pye dog campaigns hitherto lacking in their residential area.

They obliged civic agencies to spend approximately Rs 8 million in three years on development work.

This includes construction of embankment walls of a 1900 ft open sewage drain that used to overflow its unpaved boundary into nearby homes.

According to Safina Siddiqi, founder and president of Karachi Administration Women Welfare Society — KAWWS pronounced "cause", the society was formed in mid '88 by a small group of desperate housewives who were daily confronted with the virtual slum like condition in their neighbourhood.

The local management of their cooperative housing society had failed



Garbage bins fixed on self help basis by residents.

miserably over past three decades to provide the very basic needs such as metalled roads, street lights, sewerage and water lines, garbage drums and refuse collection system. Gross inefficiency and mismanagement being at the root of this state of affairs. This was despite residents having paid all development charges to the housing society and various taxes to concerned civic agencies.

The Municipal Corporation, its zonal committee and Water & Sewerage Board on their part refused to take over maintenance of basic services in their area on grounds, development work was either incomplete or sub-standard. The residents were left high and dry — not unusual in most housing societies in the country.

Three years of continuous group pressure-petitions, follow-ups, letter campaigns and reminders turned around the desperate environmental situation. The

One is surprised by these achievements since none of these ladies are working women-familiar with office procedures or conversant with the organisational structure and working of the local government and its numerous agencies and departments, or with formal management skills. Many of this 60-member body are grandmothers in the 45-65 age group. Others are 25-40 year old housewives.

It was their sheer determination and hard work which helped them overcome the bureaucratic obstacles — misplaced or lost applications and files, last minute cancellation of meetings appointments not kept documents not reaching the office next door or funds allocated for their projects diverted to other areas and the constant excuse of "shortage of funds and resources".

Learning quickly from each experience they confidently presented their case in

In her presentation at the Global Assembly, Safina made a few suggestions based on her experience to make similar efforts repeatable and sustainable in other parts of the world as well. They are:

- setting up pressure groups of women in every housing society,
- involvement of senior women in motivating the community for self help and persuading civic agencies for action. Senior women are easily accepted both at home and in office in male dominated societies,
- representation of women in the set up of municipal committees as they can devote more time than young housewives or working men,
- grassroots non-government organisations (NGOs) to assist civic agencies in the implementation of various schemes, by physically monitoring the progress of different projects and giving timely feed back to concerned authorities,



Plantation of trees and maintenance by KAWWS on Kh. Moinuddin Chishti Road (May, 1991).



Garbage strewn on the unpaved Kh. Moinuddin Chishti Road (1989).

local government and municipal authorities have already completed major development work and are providing fairly regular municipal services.

The management of Karachi Administration Employees Cooperative Housing Society (KAECHS) was forced to replace 2300 ft of broken and choked sewerage line-through frequent protests of the group and timely intervention of Housing and Town Planning on KAWWS' request.

The group is now gradually assuming the role of a local environmental watchdog. Currently they are working on the development of parks and road islands in collaboration with the Department of Horticulture of ZMC (South), and maintenance of refuse collection system with the assistance of ZMC's Health Department.

hand written applications in Urdu, insisted upon officials to endorse their copies, maintained a careful record of the correspondence, lost no time in providing copies of misplaced petitions, convinced reluctant officials by showing them photographs of their problems, even hand delivered copies of important documents to various departments personally, to reduce the inordinate delays in the movement of files from one desk to another.

This is not to say there were no sources of support within the system. Members of KAWWS also owe their success to those conscientious and helpful officials at various levels who steered them towards the right track, explained the administrative and financial workings and how best to overcome these constraints.

— dialogue between NGOs, donor agencies and civic authorities on their role and responsibilities in development projects and

— decentralisation of the municipal system, with greater decision making powers, administrative and financial control with local area councillors,

They also felt that the government should make its Environmental Protection Agency effective as a watchdog.

In the backdrop of complete failure of successive governments, politicians and ultimately the citizens of Pakistan to develop and provide basic services to the ordinary man, this recognition of a small group of housewives restores one's optimism in the ability of ordinary citizens to make a different in their existing living conditions. ■

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DAWN 9/81

KDA team inspects 'green belt'

By Our Staff Reporter

KARACHI, Aug 8: A team of KDA officials on Thursday inspected the site of a "green belt" along the open sewerage line in KDA Scheme-10 called Karachi Administration Employees Cooperative Housing Society which was being converted into a commercial site for flats-cum-shopping complex despite the residents resentment.

A three-man team was sent by the KDA on a directive from Provincial Housing and Town Planning Minister Dr Ishratul Ebad Khan who had received a complaint against the conversion of proposed 159 acre green belt for commercialisation of the area mad. by a delegation of Karachi Administration Women Welfare Society (KAWWS) led by its President Ms Safina Siddiqui.

KDA team will submit its report to KDA Member Technical Sabahat Ali Khan of its inspection. The team was shown existing commercial areas which were stated to be far in excess of the requirements of the locality where over 250 shops already exist — majority of them lying vacant.

The Women team, Area Councilor, representative of the KAECHS management accompanied the team in its Block-2 to find out the "truth" about the complaint from residents, including the Women Welfare body.

The Women Society had contended that the management of KAECHS had 'blocked' the way for the owners/allottees in disregard to existing laws. The plea of the Society was that membership was open to original allottees and not to subsequent owners.

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Who needs greenery?

KARACHI: The management of Karachi Administrative Employees Cooperative Housing Society, in connivance with the officials of Karachi Development Authority, is converting a proposed green belt in the area for its commercial gains, sources told The News.

In spite of the fact that the city is faced with the worst kind of pollution, and some civic agencies are trying to increase plantation process, in order to minimise this menace, the KAECHS management is working in the opposite direction.

Sources said, the master plan of the society (KDA scheme 10), shows a green belt along the open sewerage drain. But now the management of KAECHS, with the help of some officials of KDA is trying to alter the master plan, to convert this proposed green belt into a commercial area.

"Just to earn more money for themselves, they are making all efforts to convert this green belt into a flat site with shops on the ground floor," a resident of the KAECHS said.

The residents further said that there is no need of any more shops, as there are already about 250 shops in the area. Some of these shops are still vacant, as the small area does not need so many shops.

"But the management seems to be more interested in minting money than looking after the interests of the area people," a resident said.

The residents pointed out that the entire development work in the area is either being done by the Municipal Committee South, or by the concerned residents themselves.

The construction of damaged roads, open sewerage drain or small parks, nothing has been done by the management of the society.

Sources pointed out that since 1960 four maps of the society have been revised and approved

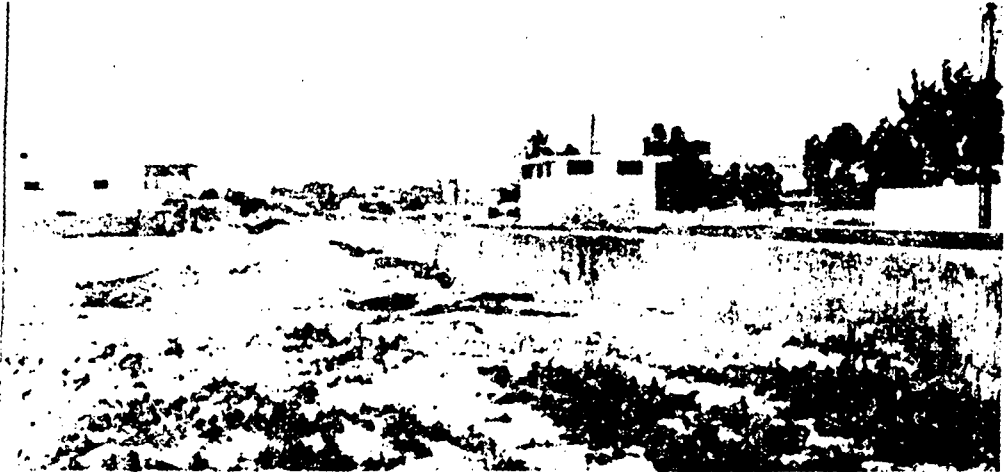
by the Master Plan and Environmental Control Department of KDA. This time too the management is trying to alter the plan without even inviting any objections from the residents of the affected area, residents of KAECHS said.

When asked why they did not objected to the management about the issue, the residents disclosed an even more interesting fact. The residents said that the purchasers

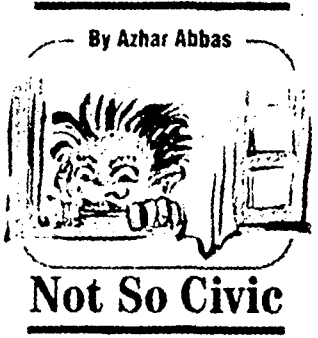
Investigations showed that the SCSA of 1925 was amended by the Sindh assembly in 1989. According to the amendment in section 17-A of the SCSA, a new section 17-B was added, that says, "A member of a co-operative housing society or a society dealing in housing development shall cease to be member of the society in case all his interest in the immovable property in the society are transferred in favour of any other

person by sale, inheritance, gift, or otherwise, and the person acquiring such interests shall subject to rules, be admitted as a member."

He said that the KDA team which came here on August 8, to investigate the issue, was totally biased. They were continuously talking in favour of the management of the society. When they were told by the residents that about 100 square yards of their 600 sq. yds. plot has been cut ille-



The proposed Green Belt which may never materialised.



are not allowed to become members of the society. And the management of KAECHS is still making all efforts to stop the purchasers' memberships, which is against the Sindh Co-operative Societies Act (SCSA), 1989.

person by sale, inheritance, gift, or otherwise, and the person acquiring such interests shall subject to rules, be admitted as a member."

"Even after the amendment, the management of KAECHS is not giving the membership to the purchasers. The interests of the management control by few big-shots are obvious now. It does not want to break its monopoly, because of material gains it is getting through these kinds of frauds," a resident of the area said.

The residents are of the view that due to the involvement of some high officials of KDA, it has become very for them to stop this conversion.

"If the officials of KDA are themselves involved with the management of the society, in this vi-

gally by the society and included it in the commercial area. One of the KDA team member, remarked sarcastically, "You should be thankful that you have got these 500 yards left with you."

"We have made complaints to the Minister of Housing, Town Planning and Public Health Engineering, to the Commissioner Karachi, to the Director General of the KDA and to many others about the whole issue and about this behaviour, but to no avail.

Irony is that on the one hand the civic agencies are claiming that they trying to beautify the city, and on the other they are unable to stop even this small green belt from being converted into another commercial site," the resident added.



This piece of land was with stagnant water was the breeding ground for mosquitoes before the Pakr was built.—Dawn photo.

13-9-91

Real, not cosmetic chances needed

By Samina Mehdi

KARACHI: Now that a beautification campaign has been launched in the city, there is a consensus among Karachiites that it does not need cosmetic changes.

What it really needs is clean drinking water, sewerage system which works, good civic planning, wider roads for a steady flow of traffic, hospitals, playgrounds and a pollution-free atmosphere.

With more than half of its population helplessly inhaling poisonous gases present in the industrial areas and fumes emitting from diesel-run buses, mini buses, tankers and trucks, the beautification drive may appear out of place.

Traffic congestion is another sore point of city life. Tension and exertion caused by the traffic have contributed to manifold increase in the cases of hypertension, heart ailments and respiratory problems.

These problems, tragically give rise to yet another set of problems — lack of medical facilities.

With the structure of public health care in a shambles and the cost of private health facilities out of reach of the common man, these diseases often persist and claim the lives of their victims.

In spite of a large number of people falling prey to pollution and lack of civic facilities, life in the city goes on because the majority are either too indifferent or helpless to attempt to change the system.

In June 1989 a group of women from Karachi Administration Cooperative Housing Society near PECHS joined together and formed the Karachi Administration Women's Welfare Society (KAWWS) to persuade civic agencies to bring better facilities to their neighbourhood.

Initially their activities were

restricted to cleaning of the area which included efforts to get sweepers from their Zonal Municipal Committee and putting garbage bins in the streets of the society.

Later, these women started work on more difficult projects.

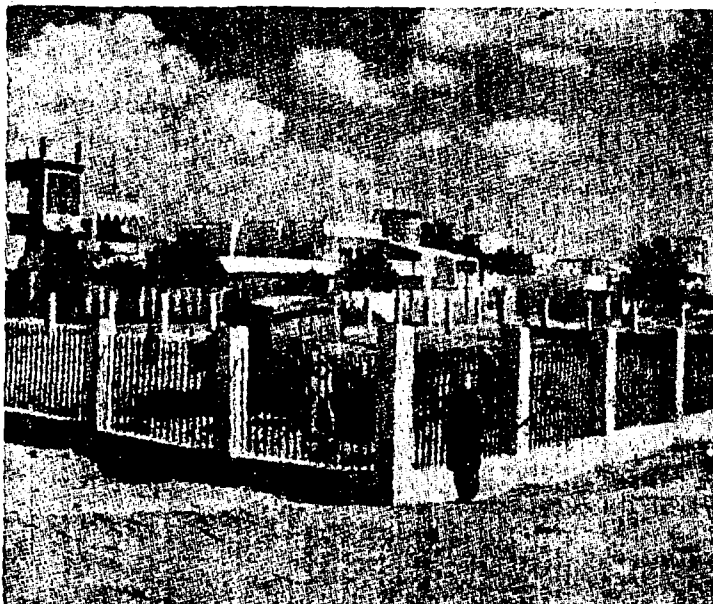
For example the nullah running along the society used to overflow during the rains and the roads broke down. Also a large number of mosquitoes bred on the stagnant water on vacant plots, roads and nullahs and used to play havoc with the 65,000 people of the area.

Now, in the neighbourhood, there is a park built on a vacant plot on which rain water used to stand for months. The park is now devoted exclusively for the use of

women and children.

"We pursued each and every application and paper sent by the society to Government departments" says Mrs Safina Siddique president of KAWWS. "It is only through a constant pressure and persuasion, that we manage to get the money for area development," she pointed out. She feels that if citizens and civic agencies work in coordination, better changes can be brought about in the civic structure.

However a revised map of the society shows provision for 82 shops the allocation of the space for shops near the park would invade the privacy of the place which is meant exclusively for women and children.



The Women's park now.—Dawn photo.

By Sabiha Ashraf

Determined to transform their neighbourhood, women unite to shake civic agencies out of their lethargy.

Operation Clean-Up

Eighteen months ago, when the gray-haired widow of journalist Zuhair Siddiqui decided to mobilise women in the Karachi

Administrative Housing Society in an effort to change living conditions in her run-down neighbourhood, she found many doors closed upon her. Some of her neighbours were reluctant even to speak to her. Today the same woman is the much loved and revered 'Safina Apa' of a now visibly brighter, cleaner and happier locality.

When Safina Siddiqui first moved into her new house in the Karachi Administrative Co-operative Housing Society (KACHS) she found living conditions in her rain-ravaged neighbourhood reminiscent of Karachi's numerous katchi abadis. The only difference was that middle class houses, instead of decrepit huts, stood marooned here, knee-deep in neglect. Non-metalled, unlighted tracks passed for roads, open sewerage drains overflowed, and seepage from faulty sewerage lines created stagnant, mosquito-breeding pools of water. Piles of garbage rotted out in the open there was an absence of parks and an abundance of pye dogs.

Approached in the past by citizens of the locality, civic agencies such as the KMC had repeatedly refused to take action, alleging that in the 35 years of its existence the KACHS had failed to develop to the minimal level at which these bodies normally take over. But that was



Spreading the good word...

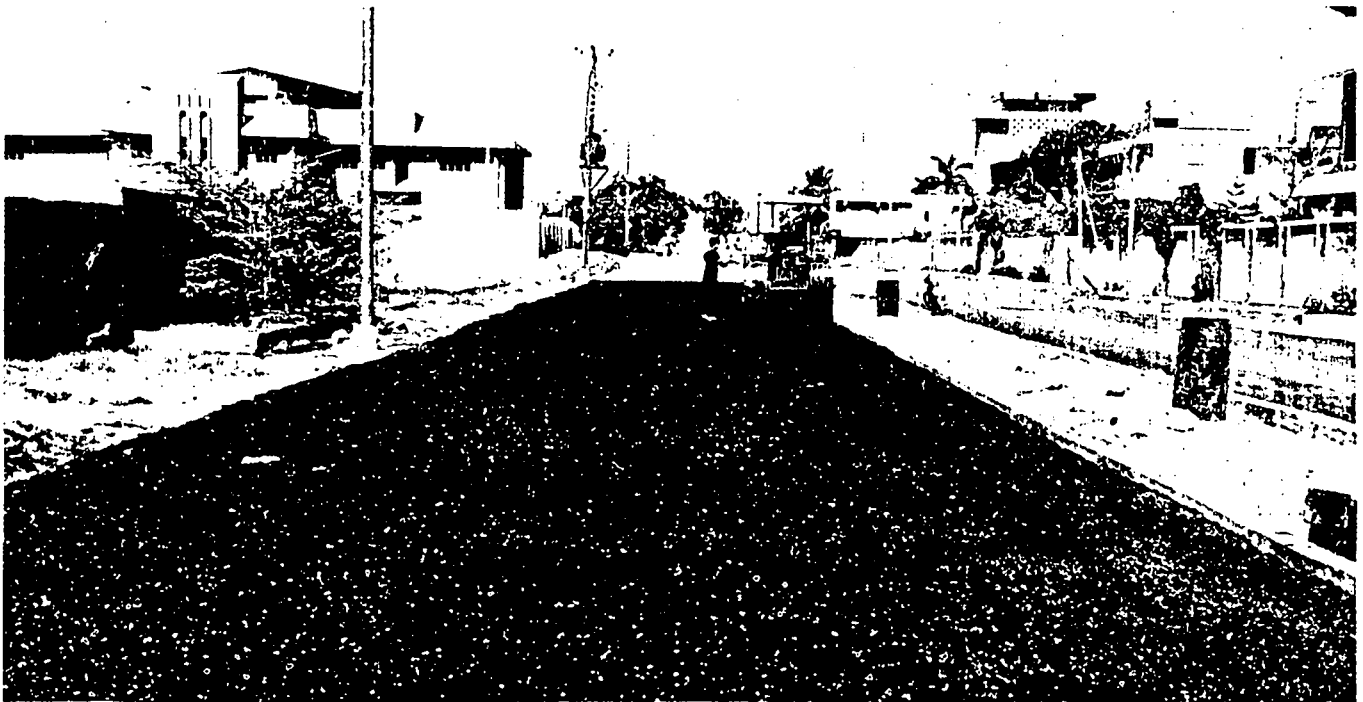
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The women realised that the mere listing of complaints and grievances would not help them; what was required was prompt, concerted and continuous action.

before Safina Siddiqui stepped in.

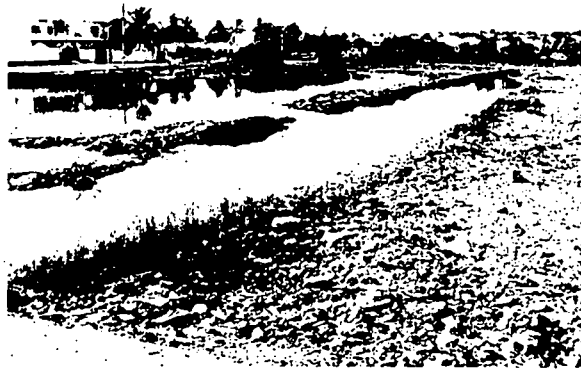
Safina decided that she would not take no for an answer: she would mobilise the women of the neighbourhood to work with her, to shake civic agencies out of their lethargy. Within days of her arrival, she had got a small group together. Recalling the early days of the Karachi Administrative Women's Welfare Society (KAWWS) she says, "It was not easy to get the women together. In fact, at first it was difficult even to talk to them as a lot of my neighbours belonged to a *biradari* whose women do not usually mix with women of other *biradaris*."

To overcome this obstacle, she enlisted a neighbour who belonged to the largest neighbourhood *biradari* to accompany her on her rounds of the homes in the neighbourhood, thus breaking down the initial barrier. As time went by, more and more women enlisted in the newly formed society. The women realised that the mere listing of complaints and grievances would not help them – what was required was prompt, concerted and continuous action. Countless phone calls and office visits later, they began to get results. Over time, as they went to various offices and spoke to concerned officials, the group became more effective. "What we kept up was persistent, unyielding pressure," says Safina. "Hardheaded officials were sometimes overwhelmed by our sheer numbers ... when all 40 of us barged in, we had to be accommodated in conference halls ... when disbelieving officials were not convinced by words,



we would show them photographs ... when that wasn't enough, we had to almost kidnap them to take them to our locality to see the truth of what we were talking about."

Days and months of persistent effort eventually paid off: more than 41 lakh rupees were cajoled out of reluctant local bodies – often on an emergency basis – to get roads built, streetlights installed, an open sewerage nullah paved and sprayed, new sewerage lines laid, pye dogs exterminated, park land reclaimed and greenery planted on bare road islands. And although these changes extend only to a few blocks of the society, Safina's pressure group hopes to extend similar benefits to all its nine blocks by getting more and more of its 40,000 people involved in their fight for a better environment. In one small but not insignificant victory, the KMC last month, finally sanctioned sweepers for the area, along with the use of a dumper truck to excavate the huge mounds of garbage that had been accumulating in a vacant plot over the years.



Before and after... a neighbourhood transformed.



In response to criticism that the society has limited its development efforts to an affluent area, Safina says, "I am willing to help and guide men and women from all areas provided they too are willing to work for what they want."

Plans for the future include covering the still open nullah and having a flyover built at the railway crossing gate at Baloch Colony, an entrance point not just for the KACHS alone but other localities as well. The flyover project, an ambitious venture involving international funding worth crores of rupees, is being doggedly pursued by Safina's pressure group and they have every hope that they will succeed in getting it off the files and boards. Meanwhile, they have succeeded in getting 'first aid' treatment for the pot-holed entrance at the railway crossing and have also located a site where an under-the-tracks passage can be made.

Having helped her own neighbourhood achieve a better living environment, Safina now looks forward to seeing the welfare society grow to play a motivational and advisory role for women in other localities with similar problems. In response to criticism that the KAWWS has limited its development efforts to an affluent area, Safina says, "I am willing to help and guide men and women from all areas provided they too are willing to work for what they want." ■

Housewives unite for action!

By Aquila Ismail

The Women's Welfare Society organised by several very enterprising

housewives living in Karachi Administrative Society have proved that it is possible to obtain civic amenities through concerted and united effort. This middle-class residential area which resembled a garbage-strewn undeveloped Kachchi abadi is now clean with gleaming new roads, garbage bins, newly planted trees and the beginnings of an awareness that this city is not without hope.

Mrs Safina Siddiqui who is the President of the WWS started off individually lobbying with the women of the neighbourhood to come forth and take up the task of approaching and convincing the municipal authorities to do something about the unpaved road, which had become garbage dumps. Mosquitoes, flies, and pye dogs were in abundance creating an enormous health hazard for the residents, especially children. During the last rains the stench was unbearable. The water collecting in the empty plots and the katcha roads became the breeding-ground for all sorts of insects, mosquitoes and flies.

Also, there is a big nullah running through the back of the residential area which carries the sewage from several parts of Karachi. Needless to say it is an open drain with no reinforcement on the sides. When it rained the sewage overflowed the banks and entered the houses situated near the nullah.

The turning point in the mobilisation of individuals into a well-knit community organisation came when the three-year old granddaughter of one of the ladies, Mrs Qureshi, fell into the nullah. She would probably have died had it not been for a passerby who saw her fall in and rescued her. She emerged green with the filth and only barely escaped contracting some serious disease. The neighbours now rallied behind Mrs Safina in combating the menace of the open nullah and the unpaved

dirty roads in front of their houses.

Another breakthrough in developing community interest was when Mrs Shaheda Huq, the Vice-President of WWS, joined in. She belongs to a conservative purdah-observing community of the locality. Mrs Shaheda proved to be the catalyst in drawing women of her biraderi, in spite of the numerous cases of opposition from the men of their families.

The General Secretary of WWS, Mrs Amra Javed tells of how the WWS started its activity in September 1988 by putting up banners demanding from their local society authority, the laying of roads, the cleaning of garbage, and the repair of the nullah. The first lot of banners placed near their houses went unheeded and was subsequently stolen. They put up another batch but also to no avail.

Then they took a delegation to the local office and were told that the municipal corporation had taken over the entire area. What they did not mention was that the KMC only formally takes over when all the development work for which the land owners had paid as development charges to the society has been completed. What happened to the money to be spent on roads, sanitation, parks collected by them is anybody's guess.

The area councillor also expressed his inability to do anything due to lack of funds. So, where does the tax we pay go, if we cannot obtain any benefits out of it? Was the question asked by the members of the WWS to which no one had an answer.

The ladies of the WWS undaunted decided to go en masse to the municipal offices in charge of their area. After several attempts, being directed from one office to another, they finally met the executive officer in charge and told him of their problems. He proved sympathetic but expressed his inability to provide any relief again due to lack of funds. The WWS insisted he come with them to see for himself the condition of the roads and the nullah. He complied and after seeing the filth, promised to send a garbage truck and some sweepers to clean up the mess. He couldn't do anything beyond that.

Now, the members of the WWS decided to change their strategy. Instead of being hasty and angry over these issues they now began to approach things more scientifically. They drew up a list of all the works needed to be undertaken in

their area. They consolidated their organisation by registering it with the Pakistan Welfare Association, printed letter heads so that correspondence could be made more effective with the many individuals and agencies that they now knew they would have to deal with. They hired a professional photographer to take photographs of the road, the nullah, the garbage and compiled these into albums so that a person looking at these could gauge for himself the extent of neglect.

Armed with this visual proof, the representatives of the WWS went from one office to another trying first to comprehend the working of the city civic machinery and find out who was actually responsible for their locality. As Mrs Safina puts it, "citizens have no idea who does what in this vast metropolis."

For one small strip of road they discovered one zonal authority and for the rest another. Also part of the nullah was under one section of the KWSB and the rest under another. The encroachments alongside the road were under the jurisdiction of the railway as there was a railway track running along one periphery of the society. The fumigation was to be undertaken by the health department of the KMC. The sweepers to clean the roads were to be provided by the local society office, and these were normally seen working in the premises of the few influential residents of the area.

With offices scattered all over the town the ladies met one officer after another and finally after five months of concentrated efforts, wherein all the members gave their time and energy, the first rollers rolled down the roads in their lanes and the paving began.

This was the beginning of the change required to make the surroundings liveable. The zonal municipal authorities now send their garbage trucks regularly to collect filth from the area. They have also provided some garbage bins, and the rest are being bought out of a collection taken from the families in the lane. The empty plots where water accumulates are fumigated once a month under the supervision of Mrs Safina who personally accompanies the fumigation staff.

Every member has undertaken to plant a tree on the island and on the sides of the roads and some tree-guards are being provided by the municipal authorities.

The repair of the nullah involves

a considerable sum of money. Mrs Amra explained how both the zonal authorities responsible for the nullah were persuaded to sit together and agree to finance the repair of the nullah. Tenders were floated and the representatives of the WWS went to the KWSB office in Safari Park to witness the opening of the bids and award of contract. The work is yet to begin but the WWS is hopeful that now that the official formalities are taken care of, work will begin soon.

Now, every newly developed area has in its scheme some open plots to be used as parks. The WWS next started lobbying for work to begin on the development of these open spaces so that children and adults could benefit from clear fresh surroundings. The members of the WWS elaborated how land reserved for parks and playing fields are divided into plots on the sly and sold off without the corporation knowing of it. One day one of the members saw bulldozers leveling the ground on the plot reserved for a park. Sensing something was up the members quickly reacted and sent letters to the KMC, met the concerned officials and obtained a ban on any construction work on the plot. They have now requested that a boundary wall be built around the space so that it is preserved as a park.

As Mrs Safina puts it "The WWS is not a welfare organisation in the sense that many operate to provide charity to the underprivileged. We are not 'Social workers'. We are a group of citizens concerned about our surroundings, our children, our roads, our open spaces. We have a long way to go. We want to prove to the women of Karachi that it is possible to get our rightful share of civic amenities if we realise that we have to fight for it ourselves."

Women have for so long considered all public activity as the domain of men that anything that concerns itself with their rights as citizens is viewed with alarm.

Indeed, if women enter into municipal life, they get the opportunity to fulfil their duties and obligations as members of a community. The education which participation in public affairs brings would enable women to fight more effectively for sanitation, housing, health benefits, education, parks, libraries roads, all of which are sadly so inadequate in this throbbing city of Karachi.

Dawn, Friday, June, 16, 1989

By Onlooker

Ravaged by rains, overflowing sewers and digging by civic agencies, the approach road to the Karachi Administration Society (adjacent to the PECHS) had been in a state of battered neglect for months.

No one came to attend to it when the post-monsoon road mending work was taken in hand all over the city in August.

Quite belatedly at the end of October, this heavily used stretch of road was put into good shape. Few are aware of the formidable

localised one.

The most significant aspect of the Welfare Society is that it has worked. Within a span of three months these women — most of them from conservative backgrounds — have managed to stir the relevant agencies into action.

According to Safina Zuhair Siddiqui, the moving spirit behind the Welfare Society, it is impossible to get an official body to act on an issue of public concern if you are a non-entity and attempt to do it single-handedly. She learnt this the hard way when she approached the Karachi Administration Society in a bid to get living conditions improved.

There is much that needs to be changed. Some blocks of the Society have kachcha tracks which

decided to mobilise the women for action. The men had given up a long time ago having failed to get the government to take measures against the Administration Society on grounds of mismanagement. So they sat back, quite willing to let the women take up the cudgels.

For the Women's Welfare Society which held its first meeting on August 12, the past three months have been hectic involving repeated visits to various offices to get its point of view across. modus operandi has been simple but very effective.

"When we have to visit an agency for the first time we get as many of our members to accompany us as we can," Safina

They are proud of their achievements so far. Two anti-pye dogs campaigns have been held. Twice KMC's anti-malarial squads have fumigated the entire Society area. All the damaged roads have been repaired. The nullah has been dredged and treated with insecticides. More street lights are being fixed. Above all, a refuse collection van of the KMC has visited the locality for the first time in decades to remove the garbage.

All this has involved countless visits to at least ten different offices ranging from the Land Department and the Railways to the Mayor and the ZMCs. Safina says she has been visiting or telephoning one office or the other practically every day since August. Not every visit is productive. Sometime a trip to one office might be required only to obtain necessary information about the powers and jurisdiction of an agency.

A graduate with no formal training and experience of this kind of work, Safina who is 57 and a widow, observes, "For us it is a process of self-education and training. We have learnt how to present our case. How to argue persuasively without becoming aggressive. How to persist when officials try to put us off on the plea that they are short of funds. We have taken photographs and prepared wall charts and brought the concerned official with us to show him the broken roads, the garbage heaps and the nullah. We have put up banners as a form of silent protest and won over many residents of the locality to our cause."

From her experience, Safina feels that consumer resistance can work in Pakistan. The concerned institutions have to be made aware of the problems citizens face. Consumer groups can be mobilised to identify the problems and suggest specific solutions.

But this must be a continuous process. Safina has been heartened by the response of the official agencies. Even if they could not help, they have been very polite and courteous to the women.

The success of the Women's Welfare Society has encouraged it to aim higher. While it plans to keep up the pressure for sanitation measures, its long-term programme includes getting the nullah paved, the sewerage system in the Society completed, all the roads in the locality built, a permanent garbage collection system instituted, the illegal allotment of amenity plots stopped and, most ambitious of all, the work started on a flyover across the railway tracks. And all this for Rs 50 per month each member of the Welfare Society pays voluntarily for financing its transport expenditure.



Supervising garbage removal

Women power at work

women power. That went into its repair.

But the Councillor of the area, the KMC, the ZMC and other agencies concerned know better. They have found it impossible to ignore the forty or so women who have periodically visited their offices demanding what they insist is their right as tax-payers. They call themselves the Karachi Administration Women Welfare Society.

It is not an association with a formal structure or well-defined more a citizens con- though a very

pass off as roads. Others have no sewerage system at all. An open nullah on one end overflows its banks and serves as a fertile breeding ground for mosquitoes.

Most shocking is the absence of a garbage collection system which means every vacant plot houses piles of refuse which is never removed. Safina's initial efforts to get this state of affairs changed came to naught.

Safina had nearly despaired when she discovered that her neighbours were equally disenchanted. It was then that she de-

observes. "This could be anything from 30 to 35. The idea is to create an impact on the official we approach and the strategy has worked."

One visit is, however, never enough. Invariably there have to be follow-up visits. Four or five activists pay the necessary repeat calls to get the work done.

Amera, Shahida and Musarrat, who are the keenest and most active workers, are confident that they will succeed this time. Their earlier efforts to organise a garbage collection service on a self-help basis had failed.



Text of Speech Presented at Global Assembly

November, 1991

Ladies and gentlemen, hello, before I present my story, I would like to thank the Senior Women's Advisory Group for selecting my work as a success and for giving me this opportunity to share my experience with you.

Although my story is in the category of "waste", but actually it is a fight of house-wives for basic urban services like - roads, electrification, clean drinking water, parks and play grounds, regular removal of domestic garbage, proper sewerage system etc.

My story takes place in a small housing society located in the south of Karachi. This housing society was established 35 years ago on an area of one hundred fifty nine acres, and today has a population of sixty five thousand. It is described as a middle class area with socially conservative values specially for women.

Upto 1988, the physical conditions of this area were so poor that it was considered a slum area. The general conditions were unhygienic and a constant source of health problems.

But, three years later, today the picture is different. Because of our efforts, eighty percent roads have been built, street lights fixed, major portion of broken sewerage lines replaced, three parks and a play ground are under construction, garbage is removed twice a week by a refuse collection van. One of the parks has been designed specially for women and children.

For every rupee spent by our group, we have persuaded the civic agencies to spend 80 rupees on development work. Upto now a total of 8 million rupees have been spent by the civic agencies.

The key to our success is - group pressure, follow-ups, and motivation of both the community and the concerned civic agencies.

Some of the challenges that we face both in the community and the civic agencies are :

- lethargy
- lack of interest in civic problems
- lack of awareness about the effects of environmental pollution on health
- in-sensitivity to un-hygienic living conditions
- lack of education
- discouraging attitude towards women
- and the tendency to complain instead of finding a solution



- 2 -

The specific challenges that we have to overcome in the civic agencies include :

- inefficiency
- corruption
- lack of funds and man-power
- frequent changes in government
- too much paper work
- lack of accountability
- non-recognition of basic urban services as a right of the tax paying citizens;
- use of English as official language in all offices.
- files and applications disappearing from government offices etc.

The community was :

- demoralized, waiting for God or the government to take any action
- discouraging towards our efforts for self-help and collective action
- the men were un-willing to contribute either their time or money in our efforts to change the situation.
- women were not allowed to join our group, because visiting offices and mixing with men outside their family, is not considered a good thing in this society
- the women in particular did not know how the government works and the functions of various civic agencies
- they could hardly write an application in their own language

- *lack of organisational skills in women*

But our group of house-wives was successful in achieving its goals in a short period of 3 years despite all the obstacles that I have just mentioned. I am very happy today, to share my key success factors with you, they are :

- faith in our cause
- determination to succeed
- group pressure, follow-up and constant persuasion of civic agencies to take action
- continuous motivation of community to take interest in its neighbourhood
- our willingness to do change our conditions without waiting for the government to take the first step
- our refusal to take no for an answer



- 3 -

- our constant monitoring of physical work done by civic agencies even in very hot and harsh wether.
- my age factor was a plus point for my group, because the conservative men allowed their wives in the presence of an elderly women, to visit various offices.
- we encouraged the women to make use of their own ability for collective betterment and thus develop self confidence.

Based on my experience, I have a few suggestions to offer, to make this story repeat-able, afford-able and sustain-able in other countries with similar problems.

1. Involve senior women in motivating the community and persuading the civic agencies. Senior women can give more time for these activities compared to young house-wives. They command more respect in eastern cultures and are more acceptable in male dominated environments - both at home and in offices..
2. Local governments and grass-root organisations should cooperate by sharing responsibilities. The government must provide funds and carry out the physical work, because small communities cannot collect enough money for expensive projects like construction of roads, sewerage and water lines etc.

The grass root organisations must contribute their time and energy to monitor the physical work carried out by civic agencies and give feedback to concerned departments at the right time .

3. Local government, citizens, and foreign agencies that give funds for urban basic services and development work, must sit on one table to discuss the role and responsibility of grass-root organisations in improving the environment.
4. Set-up pressure groups of women in each housing society.
5. Senior women must represent the citizens in the set-up of local municipal committees.
6. Awareness on environmental and public health issues must be created at all levels - in the community and the civic agencies through workshop, newspapers, radio and television.
7. Give more power and authority to environmental protection agencies



- 4 -

One of the difficulties for a group like ours, comes when its members try to break away from the group because it will save them from giving time, energy and money for the group. Here is a challenge for the leader to bring these members back.

My advice is to continue to motivate these people by visiting them in groups, convince them of their responsibility for further improving their own environment.

After achieving some of our basic aims, we are now planning to find ways of purchasing a garbage collection truck, mobile anti-malaria fumigation machine, office equipment and having a permanent staff for street cleaning and maintenance of trees and plants on the roads.

The idea is to set-up a system managed by house-wives to provide efficient and regular basic services like daily garbage collection, sweeping of streets, anti-malaria fumigation and regular plantation of trees.

To motivate more residents to join our group and to spread a message of self-help and group pressure for urban development, we need transport. At present we do most of our work on foot.

The resources needed to make our activities sustainable include : funds, equipment, that I mentioned earlier, and transportation. All these resources are available with local governments, and if my group succeeds in getting this equipment, I think, we will be able to attract more house-wives and give very good service to the residents.

With this I stop and welcome your questions. Please note, I have brought with me a short documentary film which you are most welcome to watch.