

BALDIA SOAKPIT PROJECT



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COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION TOWARDS IMPROVED HEALTH AND SANITATION

Background

Karachi is the largest sea-port in Pakistan, capital of Sind province and largest city in the country. It has a population of over six million.

Like any large city, particularly those in developing countries, it faces the combined problems of rural-urban drift and natural population increase, as well as the attendant problems of slums, poverty, lack of education and inadequate facilities. Two million of Karachi's residents inhabit the peri-urban settlements known as

Katchi Abadis or temporary dwellings.

Baldia: The Past

As one of the larger Katchi Abadis, Baldia is no exception to the rule. Its 200,000 population is tightly packed into an area of about a thousand acres, living in closely knit communities called mohallas, of which Baldia has 39. They are a kaleidoscope of ethnic groups with one common factor — their lack of skills and education and a resulting inability and inertia to extract themselves from the rut of poverty and sub-standard conditions.

Baldia Township



Baldia: In Transition

Ironically, one impetus for change emerged



Young vendor with his wares



Assembling carton boxes

from a desire for recreation. A cricket team looking for a place to play found itself hampered by the unsanitary conditions, streets with household water, human waste and garbage.



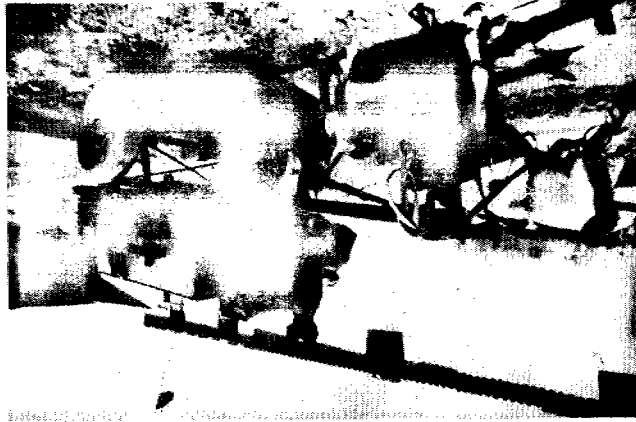
Local potter at work

To fulfill its commitment to provide assistance in slum improvement for the welfare of children,

Fortunately it was to this sanitation problem that UNICEF addressed itself in 1979 after a Dutch feasibility study had pinpointed Balda as a suitable area in which to begin activities related to UNICEF's urban development services for children.

Though the majority of homes had a bucket latrine, the alternative waste-disposal system was to discharge urine, excreta and surplus water to the streets via drains. From time to time self-employed sweepers cleared the bucket latrines and channels. There were only a few household pit latrines. With no resources, there seemed no solution.

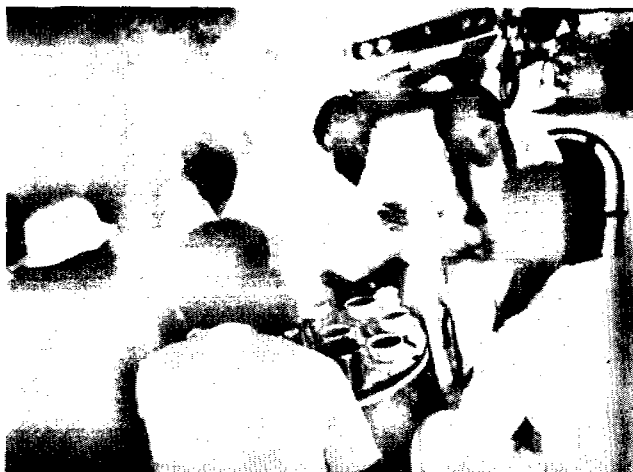
Hauling water



Dirty streets with poor drainage

UNICEF, at the suggestion of the Netherlands' advisers, undertook the construction of low cost, long-life soakpit latrines,* as the initial entry into the community for the expansion of community development activities.

A collaborative programme was developed with two local institutions. Initially, the Jaycees (the Junior Chamber of Commerce) had hired a construction team on a contract basis and provided 70 latrines free of cost to householders. The other institution – the Social Work Department of the University of Karachi – was committed to the community participation approach. The social



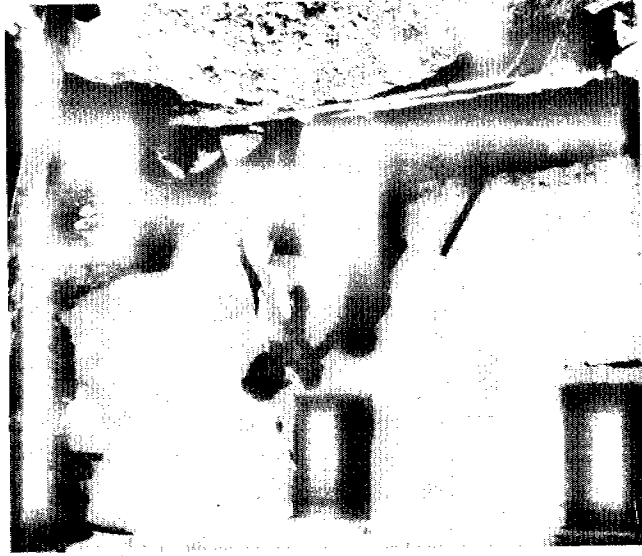
University Social Workers discuss soakpits with Baldia residents

*A ground pit with permeable sides through which liquid wastes can seep to be neutralised by natural soil process. The soakpit is connected to a water seal pan which can be flushed with a minimum of water. For a family of 9–10 members a pit will last 10 – 15 years.



Latrine and household wastes flow to the streets from this exit

workers went directly to the Turk Mohalla community, sat with residents in their teashops, discussed their problems and broached the soakpit solution.



Young turk residents help in all ways in latrine construction

It was the young cricket fans who were the most enthusiastic and determined to benefit from this idea for clearing their own piece of ground. They were only too willing to assist voluntarily if UNICEF, the Jaycees and the social workers would show the way and provide some resources.

The advent of community participation

With the same enthusiasm they applied to their

cricket, these young people had dug ten pits within a month, and 30 pits within ten weeks. The Turk pits were only partly subsidized: it was made clear that families had to make some input of their own — labour or money — if they were to get a pit constructed.

It was from here that the success of the soakpit campaign started, from a realization slowly achieved that things happen fastest when you do them yourselves.



Mother and father work together for their family's benefit

For UNICEF, the Jaycees and the social workers it was also a time for realization that three factors – seed finance, proper technology and social organization – could be meshed together to produce community awareness and action.

Community participation gathers momentum

A larger, more extensive second phase was then initiated with financing provided by the Netherlands Government. In outline, the project was conceived and implemented as follows:

Aims

- To reduce water-related infant and child morbidity and mortality.
- To stimulate widescale community construction of soakpits and initiate other social improvements for children.

Personnel

- Local participants: The community nucleus was the cricket team and other young enthusiasts who formed the Turk Welfare Society (TWS).
- A second local body – an existing, conservative, older group, the Turk Jamat – had little in common and therefore hardly collaborated

with the newly formed younger TWS group.

- External participants: two full-time community workers, a community organizer from the university and a technical adviser (engineer) from the Jaycees.

Preparatory activities

- Baseline data gathering: children's health, incidence of illness, mortality, school attendance rates, income-earning activities for women, other social indicators.



Baldia team consult outside their office

- Financial subsidies: The Jaycees provided seed money of Rs. 1000 towards the Rs. 1200-1500 costs of each soakpit. UNICEF refunded the costs incurred by the committee in procurement, delivery and labour.
- Community construction: The community employed a mason who was supervised technically by the engineer.

Implementation & achievements:

Motivation

Guided by the community organizers, the committee set about motivating householders to build their own pits, instructing them in their use, gathering volunteers and identifying poorer families (who would receive free soakpits).

Soakpit construction

Existing soakpits requiring improvement were the basis for redesigning the traditional pits so that costs could be lowered and water-seal slabs put in place. This design work was carried out by consultants from the WEDC* Group of the University of Technology, Loughborough, U.K.

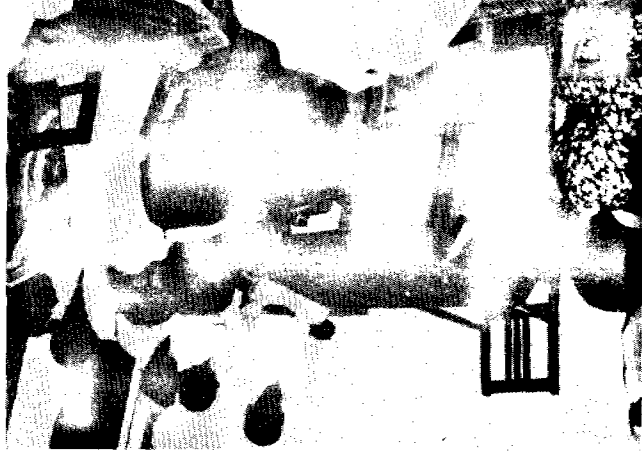
The earlier cost of Rs. 1700 was reduced to a maximum Rs. 1200 for a single 10 ft pit (the average price at present is Rs. 1050) and to Rs.

*Water and Waste Engineering for Developing Countries.

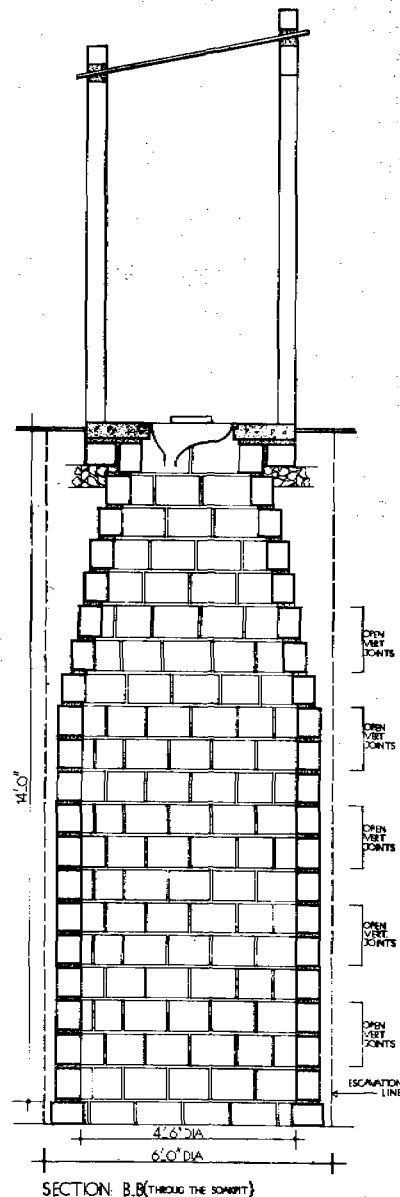


Lady surveyors go house to house for data collection

- Committee formation: A health committee was set up including two women members to organize surveys and construction. They also bought the materials and equipment, arranged delivery and organized labour.



Community meeting in progress



1350 for a double pit, of which the community pays approximately a third in labour and UNICEF the remainder.

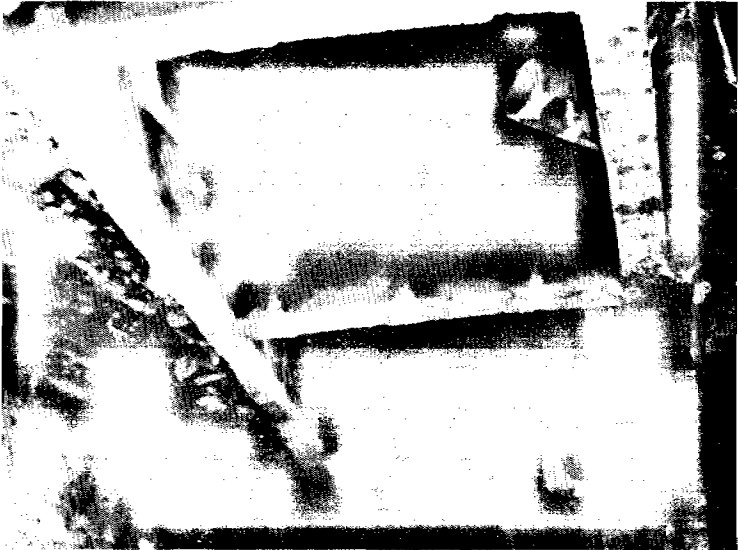
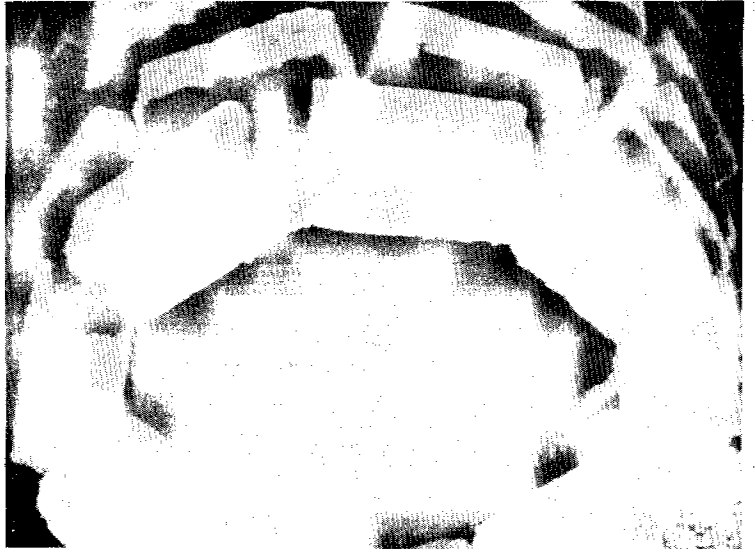
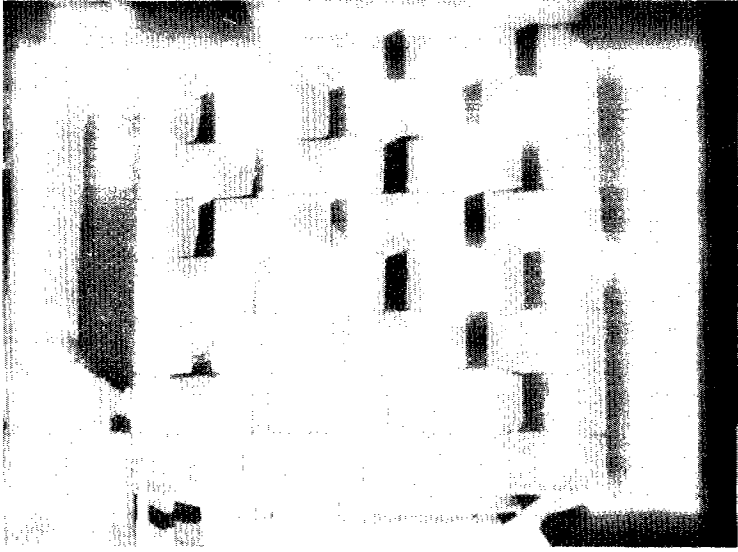
Other innovations

Slowly the streets became free from excreta and the sweepers went elsewhere. A new pipe was installed that boosted the water supply for the community: four more taps were added, bringing the number to 12. Drains were begun in the narrow streets to take off waste water and rainwater.



These boys really like the new, dry cleanliness of their yard

Steps in the construction of different soakpitt models



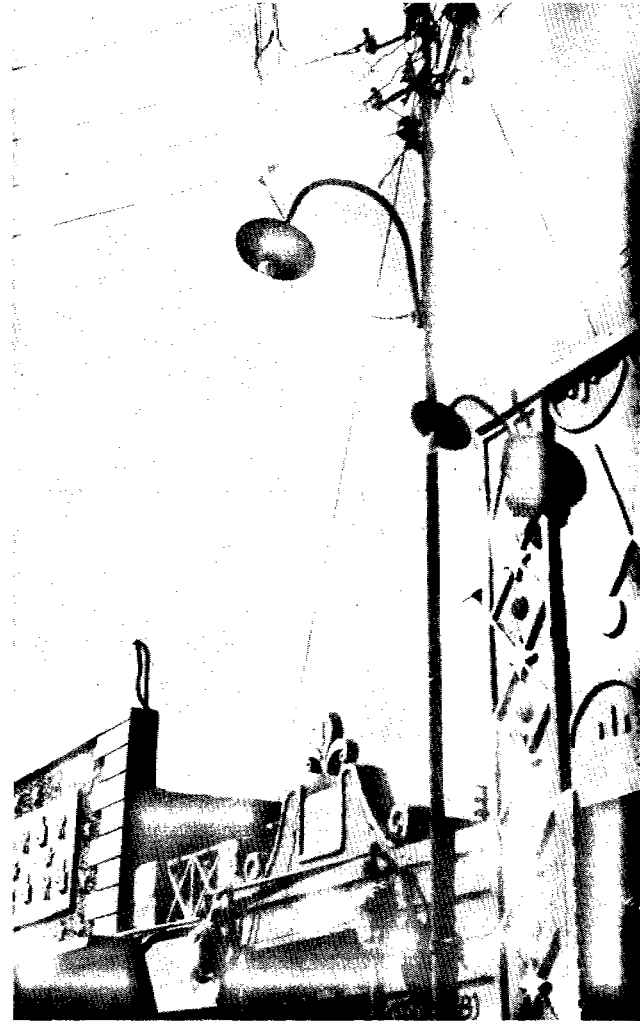
Roads and alleys were paved. Street-lights began to appear. A water storage tank was built. As the settlers' housing plots were regularised, the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation provided an improved physical infrastructure.



All smiles about this improvement in their home. These boys pose beside the new latrine

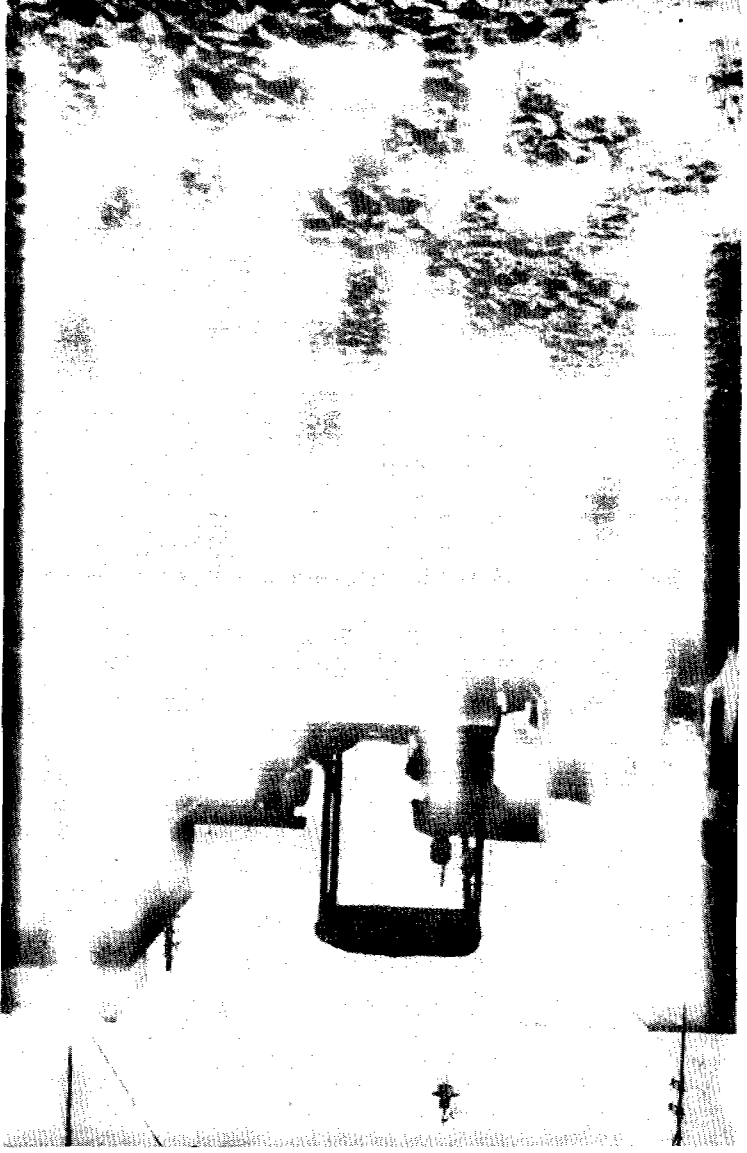
The main achievement of the whole new feeling in Turk colony was the rapid expansion and new strength of the Turk Welfare Society. Today it has over a hundred members and several dozen active workers. And the TWS has started to look to other aspects of the life of the community – its children in particular.

A moribund welfare centre has been taken over by the members and become alive again. With the





Additional water pipes mean less distance to go for water collection



Paving roads

help of some official subsidy, primary medical advice is available for Rs. 2-3 a patient to those families that can show cards testifying that they have built a soakpit in their home.



The lady health visitor registers a new patient

The Society now has some meeting rooms which it has rented from a local leader. A women's club has been set up. And there are plans for a maternity centre. Now the Turk Jamat and the Turk Welfare Society have been convinced that a united front is better for achieving common goals, and they have amalgamated.

Education

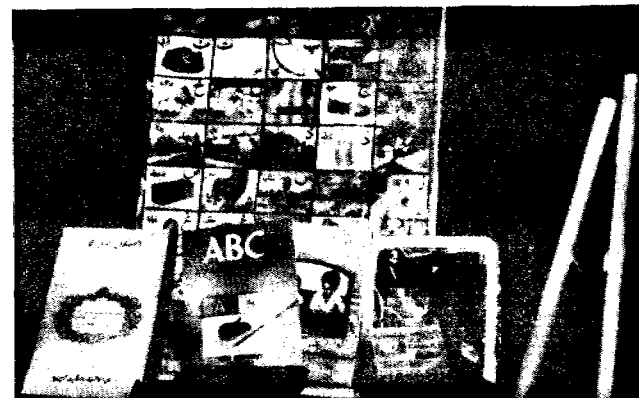
But perhaps the most significant new initiative that the people of Turk Colony have taken is in home schools. The traditional concept of poorer



Home school teachers during training

children attending an informal school – the home school – has been taken up and systematically developed since 1980, when ten schools were established in five mohallas, including Turk colony.

Community schools are self-supporting and a sensible attractive way of education for children



Home school teaching materials

Home school students intent on their lessons



(especially girls) who might not be allowed to attend the local government primary school or who might be needed most of the day for supplementing the family income.

These schools have certain advantages over formal primary schools – they are inexpensive (fees are minimal and not fixed), they are relatively simple to establish (no building, little equipment, no overheads), they are run by people that the community knows about (and has trust in), they are local (allowing girls to attend) and, because of their short duration (about a couple of hours daily) often make better use of the teaching time.

Today there are 42 home schools with 1333 students. Of the 45 teachers originally trained under the programme, only three have so far dropped out.



Home school teacher makes her own poster and students learn at the same time

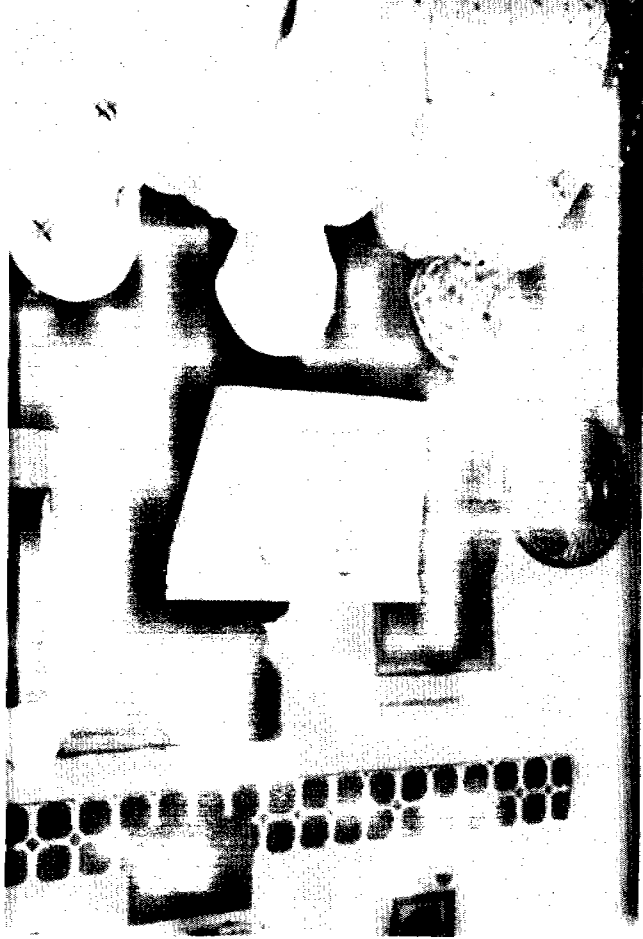


Now I can read and all doors are open

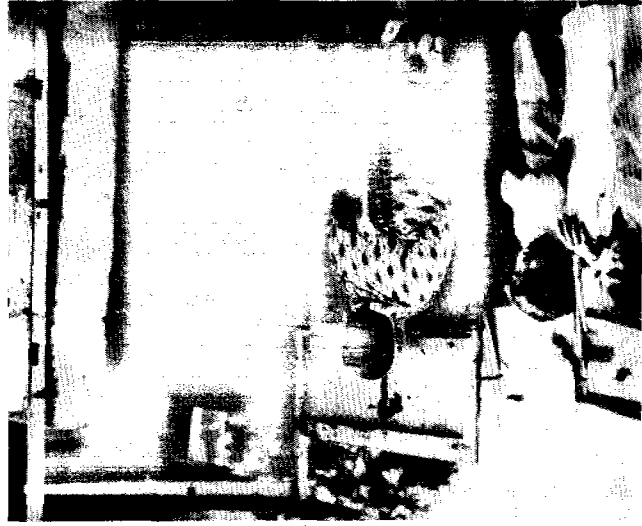
An added benefit of the mohallah school is that its children constitute fertile ground for information dissemination about soakpits and related activities; many parents influenced by their children have approached teachers about the project. Regular monthly mothers' meetings in mohallah schools provide a further forum for discussion and information on soakpits, as well as general information and education on sanitation, maternal health, nutrition, adult literacy, guidelines for on-going and future projects.

Women's participation

Almost half of the work of constructing soakpits has in fact been undertaken (or at least



Mothers meeting



Kharam Bai poses by a latrine she helped build

overseen) by women. In some cases they did the digging. This is not too surprising in view of the impact such a physical change has in the cramped quarters available to most families in the Baldia townships. With the men out at their work during the day, the responsibility for soakpits falls to women with their other household responsibilities.

The initiative for soakpits often comes from women anyway. It is the women who suffer most the inconveniences and indignities when there are no toilet facilities in the home; it is the women who have to take care of the needs of their children and any ageing housebound relatives.

The women of the mohallahs have been brought

together in a common cause with the soakpit campaign, and while an all-women health committee might have been in danger of stirring up a reaction among the men, all the committees have women representatives among their most active members.

Interests go beyond soakpits to associated health matters, not just curative services but preventive health too.

Baldia: The Future

The challenge of the experience in Baldia is to



A dramatically improved Baldia street

build upon the process of the local community's involvement as well as to develop links with appropriate government agencies. The Commissioner of Karachi and the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation have provided support in the developments which have occurred. Regular meetings between the Jaycees, University personnel and UNICEF have provided an effective institutional framework for the planning and supervision of the project.

Local community groups will continue to actively combine their efforts towards achieving more environmentally acceptable conditions. This will materially affect the well-being of vulnerable groups.

The project has already gathered momentum: from the original two colonies participating in soakpit construction and related activities, today the number has risen to 14 communities – a natural and beneficial spillover effect which should be carefully nurtured and guided.

The motivation and technical skill of the project field staff in continuing to provide an innovative and catalytic role will be also a key factor in assisting the people of Baldia achieve much from modest beginnings. At the least a start has been made.

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