Twelve

ON-THE-GROUND SOLUTIONS FOR ENDING POVERTY

The end of poverty will require a global network of cooperation among people who have never met and who do not necessarily trust each other. One part of the puzzle is relatively easy. Most people in the world, with a little bit of prodding, would accept the fact that schools, clinics, roads, electricity, ports, soil nutrients, clean drinking water, and the like are the basic necessities not only for a life of dignity and health, but also for economic productivity. They would also accept the fact that the poor may need help to meet their basic needs, but they might be skeptical that the world could pull off any effective way to give that help.

If the poor are poor because they are lazy or their governments are corrupt, how could global cooperation help? Fortunately, these common beliefs are misconceptions, only a small part of the explanation, if at all, of why the poor are poor. I have noted repeatedly that in all corners of the world, the poor face structural challenges that keep them from getting even their first foot on the ladder of development. Most societies with good harbors, close contacts with the rich world, favorable climates, adequate energy sources, and freedom from epidemic disease have escaped from poverty. The world's remaining challenge is not mainly to overcome laziness and corruption, but rather to take on geographic isolation, disease, vulnerability to climate shocks, and so on, with new systems of political responsibility that can get the job done.

In the next chapters, I lay out a strategy for ending extreme poverty by 2025. The strategy focuses on the key investments—in people and in infrastructure—that can give impoverished communities around the world, both rural and urban, the tools for sustainable development. We need plans, systems, mutual accountability, and financing mechanisms. But even before we have all of that apparatus—or economic plumbing—in place, we must first understand more concretely what such a strategy means to the one billion-plus people who can be helped. It is the bravery, fortitude, realism, and sense of responsibility of the impoverished and disempowered, for themselves and especially for their children, that give us hope, and spur us on to end extreme poverty in our time.

MEETING WITH THE RURAL POOR: SAURI, KENYA

Together with colleagues from the UN Millennium Project and the Earth Institute, I spent several days in July 2004 in a group of eight Kenyan villages known as the Sauri sublocation in the Siaya district of Nyanza Province, about forty-four kilometers from Kisumu, in western Kenya. We visited farms, clinics, a subdistrict and district hospital, and schools in Sauri and the environs. We met with international organizations working in the region, including ICRAF (the World Agroforestry Center), the UN Development Program, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The visit made vivid both why extreme poverty persists in rural areas and how it can be ended.

We found a region beset by hunger, AIDS, and malaria. The situation is far more grim than is described in official documents. The situation is also salvageable, but the international community requires a much better understanding of its severity, dynamics, and solutions if the crisis in Sauri and the rest of rural Africa is to be solved.

The situation is best understood through the voices of Sauri's struggling residents. In response to an invitation from our group, more than two hundred members of the community came to meet with us one afternoon (see photograph 2). Hungry, thin, and ill, they stayed for three and a half hours, speaking with dignity, eloquence, and clarity about their predicament. They are impoverished, but they are capable and resourceful. Though struggling to survive at present, they are not dispir-

ited but determined to improve their situation. They know well how they could get back to high ground.

The meeting took place on the grounds of a school called the Bar Sauri Primary School, under the auspices of a remarkable school headmistress, Ms. Anne Marcelline Omolo, who shepherds hundreds of hungry and impoverished schoolchildren, many of them orphans, through primary education and the travails of daily life. Despite disease, orphanhood, and hunger, all thirty-three of last year's eighth-grade class passed the Kenyan national secondary school exams. On a Sunday in July, we saw why. On their "day off" from school, this year's class of eighth graders sat at their desks from 6:30 A.M. until 6:00 P.M. preparing months in advance for this year's national examinations in November. Unfortunately, many who will pass the exams will be unable to take a position in a secondary school because of lack of funds for tuition, uniforms, and supplies. Nonetheless, to boost the fortitude of the eighth graders during the critical examination year, the community provides them with a cooked midday meal, with the fuel wood and water brought from home by the students (shown in photographs 3 and 4). Alas, the community is currently unable to provide midday meals for the younger children, who must fend for themselves. Many go hungry the entire school day.

The village meeting got underway on a Monday afternoon, with the villagers arriving on foot from several kilometers away. I introduced my colleagues and told the community of the Millennium Project's assignment from UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to understand the situation of communities like Sauri, and to work with villagers to identify ways to help such communities to achieve the worldwide Millennium Development Goals of reducing extreme poverty, hunger, disease, and lack of access to safe water and sanitation. I also announced that thanks to a remarkable grant from the Lenfest Foundation in the United States, the Earth Institute at Columbia University would be able to put some of the ideas to work in Sauri and help the international community learn from the experience in Sauri for the benefit of villages in other parts of Africa and beyond. Several hours later, around 5:30 P.M., we all rose from a discussion that was distressing, uplifting, and profoundly challenging—challenging, most of all, for the rich world.

Whatever the official data may show about "stagnant" rural incomes in places like Sauri, stagnation is a euphemism for decline and early death. Food output per person is falling; malaria is pervasive and increasing; AIDS stalks the community and the region, with adult prevalence on the order of 30 percent, if not higher. Rudimentary springs for collecting water for household use are often dirty, especially later in the day after extensive morning use. An NGO from the UK helped install a few protected water points, but they are too few in number, far from many homesteads, and heavily congested, sometimes yielding little more than a trickle and therefore requiring several minutes to fill a jug. Rapid population growth in the past has made farm sizes small. Fertility rates are around six children per woman, and the villagers have no access whatsoever to family planning and reproductive health services or to modern contraceptives.

I canvased the group on the material conditions of the community, and received very perceptive accounts of the grim situation. Only two of the two hundred or so farmers at the meeting reported using fertilizer at present. Around 25 percent are using improved fallows with nitrogen-fixing trees, a scientific farming approach developed and introduced into Sauri by ICRAF. With this novel technique, villagers grow trees that naturally fix nitrogen, meaning that the trees convert atmospheric nitrogen, which most food crops cannot use directly, into a nitrogen compound that food crops can use as a nutrient. The leguminous (nitrogen-fixing) trees can be planted alongside maize or other food crops. By choosing the right timing for planting and the right combination of trees and crops, the farmer gets a natural substitute for chemical nitrogen fertilizer.

So far, just one fourth of Sauri farmers use the new method. It costs money to introduce the technique and one planting season is lost. Farmers may also need to add some nonnitrogen fertilizers, especially potassium, which is also costly, too costly for the impoverished farmers. All of these additional complications could easily be addressed, and the ICRAF technique could be scaled up throughout the village, if only there were additional financial resources available to ICRAF and the village to jump-start the process.

The rest of the community is farming on tiny plots, often no more than 0.1 hectares, with soils that are utterly exhausted of nutrients, and therefore biologically unable to produce an adequate crop. The soils are so depleted of nutrients and organic matter that even if the rains are good, with yields of around one ton of maize per hectare, the households still go hungry. If the rains fail, the households face the risk of

death from immunosuppression because of severe undernutrition. Stunting, meaning low height for one's age, is widespread, a sign of the pervasive and chronic undernutrition of the children.

The real shocker came with my follow-up question. How many farmers had used fertilizers in the past? Every hand in the room went up. Farmer after farmer described how the price of fertilizer was now out of reach, and how their current impoverishment left them unable to purchase what they had used in the past. A fifty-kilo bag of diammonium phosphate (DAP) fertilizer sells for around 2,000 Ksh (Kenyan shillings) (US$25). At $500 a ton, that is at least twice the world market price. A proper application might require two to four bags per hectare, or $50 to $100 per hectare, a cost vastly beyond what the household can afford. Credits to buy fertilizer are neither available nor prudent for these farmers: a single failed crop season, an untimely episode of malaria, or some other calamity can push a household that has taken on debt into a spiral of unending indebtedness and destitution.

In my mind I started the calculations as the conversation progressed. Scaling up an appropriate combination of agroforestry and chemical fertilizer inputs would cost some tens of thousands of dollars. Yes, the amount was out of reach of the villagers themselves, but would represent a low cost per person in villages like Sauri if donors would rise to the occasion. Fortunately, on this occasion, the Earth Institute was able to respond.

As the afternoon discussion unfolded, the gravity of the community's predicament became more and more apparent. AIDS is ravaging the village, and nobody has yet had access to antiretroviral therapy. I asked how many households were home to one or more orphaned children left behind by the pandemic. Virtually every hand in the room shot up. I asked how many households were receiving remittances from family members living in Nairobi and other cities. The response was that the only things coming back from the cities were coffins and orphans, not remittances.

I asked how many households had somebody currently suffering from malaria. Around three fourths of the hands shot up. How many used antimalarial bed nets? Two out of two hundred hands went up. How many knew about bed nets? All hands. And how many would like to use bed nets? All hands remained up. The problem, many of the women explained, is that they cannot afford the bed nets, which sell for a few dollars per net, and are too expensive even when partially subsidized

(socially marketed) by international donor agencies. How many in the community were using medicine to treat a bout of malaria? A few hands went up, but the vast majority remained down. A woman launched into an explanation that the medicines sell at prices well beyond what the villagers can afford.

A year or so ago, Sauri had a small clinic, as seen in photograph 5. The doctor has since left and the clinic is now padlocked. The villagers explained that they could not afford to pay the doctor and buy the medicines, so the doctor departed. Now they fend for themselves without health care or medicines. When malaria gets bad, and their children fall into anemia-induced tachycardia (rapid heartbeat), gasping for breath in small, ravaged bodies deprived of oxygen-carrying hemoglobin, they rush the child to the subdistrict hospital in nearby Yala. The mothers may carry the children on their backs or push them in wheelbarrows for several kilometers over dirt paths. Yet when we visited the Yala subdistrict hospital on our way from the village, we found a hospital with patients lying on cots in the halls—without running water, an in-house doctor (one visits only two afternoons per week), or even one complete surgical kit.

A few years back, Sauri's residents cooked with locally collected fuel wood, but the decline in the number of trees has left the sublocation bereft of sufficient fuel wood. The quarter or so households who are using the ICRAF system of improved fallows, based on leguminous trees, have a dedicated supply of fuel wood. Other farmer households do not. Villagers said that they now buy pieces of fuel wood in Yala or Muhanda (both a few kilometers away), a bundle of seven sticks costing around twenty-five shillings (thirty cents). These seven sticks are barely sufficient for cooking one meal. In our meeting with the villagers, I conveyed astonishment at the price, thirty cents per meal, for a community that earns almost no money at all. A woman responded that many villagers had in fact reverted to cooking with cow dung or to eating uncooked meals.

As this village dies of hunger, AIDS, and malaria, its isolation is stunning. There are no cars or trucks owned or even used within Sauri, and only a handful of villagers said they had ridden in any kind of motorized transport during the past year. Only three or four of the two hundred or so said that they get to the regional city of Kisumu each month, and about the same number said that they had been to Nairobi, Kenya's commercial and political capital, four hundred kilometers away, once

during the past year. There are virtually no remittances reaching the village. Indeed, there is virtually no cash income of any kind reaching the village. Given the farmers' meager production, farm output must be used almost entirely for the household's own consumption, rather than for sales in the market. The community has no money for fertilizers, medicines, school fees, or other basic needs that must be purchased from outside of the villages. Around half of the individuals at the meeting said that they had never made a phone call in their entire lives. (Ironically, and promisingly, our own mobile phones worked fine in the village, relying on a cell tower in Yala. Extending low-cost telephony to the village, for example based on a mobile phone shared by the community, would therefore pose no infrastructure problems.)

This year the rains are failing again, another disaster in an increasingly erratic climate, quite possibly a climate showing the increasing effects of long-term man-made climate change emanating from the rich world. The two roof-water harvesting cisterns at the school are now empty, and the farmers fear disaster in the harvest next month. The Kenyan government has already put out a worldwide appeal for emergency aid to fight imminent starvation in several provinces, including Nyanza.

This village could be rescued, and could achieve the Millennium Development Goals, but not by itself. Survival depends on addressing a series of specific challenges: nutrient-depleted soils, erratic rainfall, holoendemic malaria, pandemic HIV/AIDS, lack of adequate education opportunities, lack of access to safe drinking water and latrines, and the unmet need for basic transport, electricity, cooking fuels, and communications. All of these challenges can be met, with *known, proven, reliable, and appropriate* technologies and interventions.

The crux of the matter for Sauri sublocation can be stated simply and directly:

Sauri's villages, and impoverished villages like them all over the world, can be saved and set on a path of development at a cost that is tiny for the world but too high for the villages themselves and for the Kenyan government on its own.

African safari guides speak of the Big Five animals to watch for on the savannah. The international development community should speak of the Big Five development interventions that would spell the difference between hunger, disease, and death and health and economic development. Sauri's Big Five, identified by the villagers as well as by the UN Millennium Project, are

- **Agricultural inputs.** With fertilizers, improved fallows (with ICRAF's proven technologies), green manures and cover crops, water harvesting and small-scale irrigation, and improved seeds, Sauri's farmers could triple the food yields per hectare and quickly end chronic hunger. In addition, storage facilities would allow the village to sell the grain over the course of months, rather than all at once, thereby getting more favorable prices. Grain could be protected in locally made storage bins using leaves from the improved fallow species tephrosia, which has insecticide properties. These improvements would be of particular advantage for the women, who do the lion's share of African farm and household work.

- **Investments in basic health.** A village clinic with one doctor and nurse for the five thousand residents would provide free antimalarial bed nets; effective antimalarial medicines; treatments for HIV/AIDS opportunistic infections (including highly effective and low-cost Bactrim); antiretroviral therapy for late-stage AIDS; and a range of other essential health services, including skilled birth attendants and sexual and reproductive health services.

- **Investments in education.** Meals for all the children at the primary school could improve the health of the schoolchildren, the quality of education, and the attendance at school. Expanded vocational training for the students could teach them the skills of modern farming (for example, using improved fallows and fertilizer), computer literacy, basic infrastructure maintenance (electrical wiring, use and maintenance of a diesel generator, water harvesting, borewell construction and maintenance), carpentry, and the like. With a mere thousand households in Sauri, villagewide classes once a month could train adults in hygiene, HIV/AIDS, malaria control, computer and mobile phone use, and a myriad of other technical and enormously pressing topics. Without doubt, the village is ready and eager to be empowered by increased information and technical knowledge.

- **Power, transport, and communications services.** Electricity could be made available to the villages either via a power line (from Yala or Nyanminia) or an off-grid diesel generator. The electricity would power lights and perhaps a computer for the school; pumps for safe well water; power for milling grain and other food processing, refrigeration, carpentry; charges for household batteries (which could be used for

household illumination); and other needs. The villagers emphasized that the students would like to study after sunset but cannot do so without electric lighting. A village truck could bring in fertilizers, other farm inputs, and modern cooking fuels (for example, canisters of liquid petroleum gas [LPG], familiar from American backyard barbecues), and take out harvests to the market, transport perishable goods and milk for sale in Kisumu, and increase opportunities for off-farm employment for youth. The truck could rush women with childbirth complications and children with acute complications of anemia to the hospital. One or more shared mobile phones for the village could be used for emergencies, market information, and generally to connect Sauri with the outside world.

- **Safe drinking water and sanitation.** With enough water points and latrines for the safety and convenience of the entire village, women and children of the village would save countless hours of toil each day fetching water. The water could be provided through a combination of protected springs, borewells, rainwater harvesting, and other basic technologies. There is even the possibility of establishing links with an existing large-scale storage tank and pumping station a few kilometers away.

The irony is that the costs of these services for Sauri's five thousand residents would be very low. Here are some quick guesses, which colleagues at the Earth Institute are refining:

Fertilizers and improved fallows for the five hundred or so arable hectares would be roughly $100 per hectare per year, or $50,000 per year for the community.

A clinic, staffed by a doctor and nurse, providing free malaria prevention and care and additional free basic services other than antiretrovirals, would cost around $50,000 per year. (Antiretrovirals would be provided by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria, the U.S. Emergency Plan, and other programs.) School meals could be paid for communally out of just a small part of the incremental grain yields achieved through the application of fertilizers.

A village truck would be an annual inclusive running cost of perhaps $15,000 per year if amortized over several years (or leased from a manufacturer). Modern cooking fuel for the primary and secondary school students (numbering about a thousand) in the entire subloca-

tion would cost an additional $5,000 per year. A few village cell phones and a grain storage facility would add perhaps $5,000 per year, for a total of $25,000 per year.

A combination of protected springs (with improved access), borewells (with pumps), and community taps connected to the large-scale storage system would provide access to water at ten convenient locations and cost around $25,000 dollars.

Electricity could be provided to the school, the nearby clinic, and five water points by a dedicated off-grid generator or by a power line from Yala or Nyanminia for an initial cost of about $35,000. For another $40,000 in initial costs and recurring costs of $10,000, every household could be provided with a battery/bulb assembly to light a small bulb for a few hours every night with the battery charging station connected to the village generator. The annualized costs would be $25,000 per year.

Additional expenses would include scaling up educational activities, various costs of local management, technical advice from agricultural extension officers, and other related delivery services.

My Earth Institute colleagues and I estimated that the combined costs of these improvements would total around $350,000 per year, or roughly $70 per person per year in Sauri, for at least the next few years. The benefits would be astounding: decisive malaria control (with transmission reduced by perhaps 90 percent, judging from recent CDC bednet trials in a neighboring area), a doubling or tripling of food yields per hectare with a drastic reduction of chronic hunger and undernutrition, improved school attendance, a reduction of water-borne disease, a rise in incomes through the sale of surplus grains and cash crops, the growth of cash incomes via food processing, carpentry, small-scale clothing manufacturing, horticulture, aquaculture, animal husbandry, and a myriad of other benefits. With anti-AIDS drugs added to the clinic's services, the mass deaths from AIDS, as well as the deluge of newly orphaned children, could also be stanched.

Sooner rather than later, these investments would repay themselves not only in lives saved, children educated, and communities preserved, but also in direct commercial returns. Consider the case of fertilizers, which are currently unused, since households lack access to storage, transport, credit, and a financial cushion against the risk of crop failures even if credit is made available. A fertilizer application of $100 per hectare (such as two hundred kilos of DAP), combined with or substituted by improved fallows (as appropriate), could raise crop yields in a

normal season from one ton per hectare to three tons per hectare, with a marketable value of the increment of roughly $200 to $400 dollars per hectare, assuming that transport is available and there is a stable price for the maize crop. In a drought year, fertilizer and/or improved fallows would mean the difference between harvesting one ton and a failed crop (with attendant acute hunger, if not starvation). In the first few years, *fertilizers and improved fallows should be given largely for free to the villagers* to boost their own nutrition and health, and to build a small financial cushion. Later on it will be possible to share the costs with the community and, eventually, perhaps in a decade, to provide the fertilizer and improved fallows on a full commercial basis.

INTERNATIONAL DONORS AND VILLAGES LIKE SAURI

The international donor community should be thinking round the clock about one question: *how can the Big Five interventions be scaled up in rural areas like Sauri?* With a population of some thirty-three million people, of whom two thirds are in rural areas, Kenya would require annual investments on the order of $1.5 billion per year for its Sauris, with donors filling most of that financing gap, since the national government is already stretched beyond its means. (More precise estimates of cost would have to be worked out in the context of detailed development plans as described in chapter 14.) Instead, donor support to Kenya is around $100 million, or a mere one fifteenth of what is needed. Kenya's debt servicing to the rich world is around $600 million per year, so its budget is still being drained by the international community, not bolstered by it.

This is all the more remarkable since Kenya is a new and fragile democracy that should be receiving considerable help from its development partners. Kenya, ironically, is also a victim of global terrorism, caught in a war not of its own making. U.S. and Israeli targets on Kenyan soil have been hit in recent years, sending Kenya's tourist industry into a downward spiral and causing hundreds of deaths of Kenyans and massive property damage.

The UN Millennium Project is working with the government of Kenya to ensure that its poverty reduction efforts are bold enough to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. This strategy will require much greater development assistance and deeper debt cancellation from the rich world to enable Kenya to invest in the Big Five—agriculture, health and education, electricity, transport and communications, and safe drinking water—not only in Sauri villages, but across impoverished rural Kenya. Yet when the Kenyan government recently proposed a national social health insurance fund, the very thing needed to scale up access to basic health care, donors quickly objected rather than jumped at the opportunity to examine how it could actually be accomplished.

The issue of corruption overshadows donor relations with the Kenyan government. Much of the corruption reflects holdouts from the earlier regime of more than two decades, corrupt officials who have not yet been weeded out. Part of the corruption is new and completely avoidable, but only if donors help Kenya to improve the functioning of the public administration, not by moralizing and finger pointing but by the installation of computer systems, published accounts, job training and upgrading, higher pay for senior managers so that they do not have to live off bribes and side payments, continued support for the government's already major efforts to improve the judicial system, empowerment of local villages to oversee the provision of public services, and some humility on the part of donors. Most donor governments have corruption inside their own governments and even in the provision of foreign aid (which is often linked to powerful political interests within the donor countries). The affliction is widespread, and needs to be attacked systematically and cleverly, but without useless and false moralizing.

Donors should sit down with the government leadership and say, "We'd like to help you scale up the Big Five in Kenya's villages to enable you to ensure that all of Kenya's rural poor have access to agricultural inputs, health, education, electricity, communications and transport, and safe water and sanitation. Together, let's design a budgetary and management system that will reach the villages and ensure a monitorable, governable, and scalable set of interventions across the country. We're prepared to pay if you are prepared to ensure good governance on such a historic project." Private international consulting firms could be brought in to help design these systems and to lend credibility to their implementation and performance.

With a little more forethought, donors and governments could take advantage of the crucial fact that villages like Sauri have a group moni-

toring and enforcement mechanism automatically built into village life that can help to ensure that aid to the village is well used. Just as experience with group lending in microfinance has been highly successful, projects that empower village-based community organizations to oversee village services have also been highly successful. Recent experiences with village governance in India, based on the *panchayats* (local councils), are but one notable example. In Sauri, the villagers jumped with eagerness at the invitation to form various committees (schooling, clinics, transport and electricity, farming) to help prepare for the actual investments and to ensure proper governance as they are put into place. Headmistress Omolo, who oversaw the formation of the committees, also ensured that the village women, with their special needs and burdens and even legal obstacles, would be well represented in each of the committees.

If donor officials would join the government of Kenya in meeting with the villagers and brainstorming with government officials, they could come up with dozens of fruitful approaches to ensure that aid actually reaches the villages. We need to be more creative in order to save the lives of millions of people now struggling to survive—and often failing—in the impoverished villages around the world. The donors and the government of Kenya can and should agree on a suitable and bold strategy. Kenya's new democracy, from the national government down to the villages, is prepared to govern the use of international help with transparency, efficiency, and equity if we can get the delivery mechanisms right and invest in the supporting information and reporting technologies.

MEETING WITH THE URBAN POOR: MUMBAI, INDIA

Several thousand miles from Sauri, Kenya, an impoverished community in Mumbai, India, struggles with the urban face of extreme poverty. A group that I met in June 2004 comes from a community that lives near the railway tracks. By near, I do not mean within range of the railway whistle as the train rolls through the city; I mean a community that lives within ten feet of the tracks. It may seem impossible, but the shacks of poster board, corrugated sheet metal, thatch, and whatever else is at hand are pushed right against the tracks, as seen in photograph 6. Children and the old routinely walk along the tracks, often within a foot or two of passing trains. They defecate on the tracks, for lack of alternative sanitation. And they are routinely maimed and killed by the trains.

An energetic and charismatic social worker, Sheela Patel, who left academic research years earlier to work with communities like this one, has brought me to meet the group. She has pioneered the cause of community organization within the very poorest slums, such as those shown in photographs 7 and 8. The NGO that she founded, the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC), is our host today. The fifty or so people assembled around the room are mostly women in their thirties and forties, but they look much older after decades of hard physical work and exposure to the elements. They have come to meet with me, and also a group of visitors from Durban, South Africa, who are there to learn about community organization for slum dwellers and squatters.

The overarching theme of our discussion is not latrines, running water, and safety from the trains, but empowerment: specifically, the group is discussing how slum dwellers who own virtually nothing have found a voice, a strategy for negotiating with the city government. In the past few years, this particular group, with SPARC's support, has been negotiating arrangements to relocate away from the tracks to safer ground, in settlements with basic amenities like running water, latrines, gutters, even roads. Thousands have already been relocated, though thousands more wait to find new living quarters.

The notion of large communities of people living within a few feet of the train tracks is startling enough for me this morning. It is, to be sure, a measure of the desperation of the poorest of the poor who arrive in cities to escape rural impoverishment, even famine, and then struggle to establish survivable conditions for themselves and for their children. But I'm even more startled to learn that there is actually a Railway Slum Dwellers Federation (RSDF), which has been organized by the community members, with the aid of SPARC, to negotiate with the municipality and the Indian Railways concerning their needs and interests. In addition to SPARC and the RSDF, a third NGO is represented at the meeting, Mahila Milan (Women Together), which focuses specifically on the needs of women slum dwellers.

As the women begin to talk, the realities of extreme urban poverty and the range of solutions come vividly to the fore. Each woman begins with a kind of testimonial to the power of group action. This testimony