

"Mobile Library for Peace", Mumbai, India

Statement of purpose

Mobile libraries peace project aims to wipe out the isolation the slum communities in Mumbai experience, by providing them 'access' to information on education and healthier living. The project also foresees a holistic and self-reliant community by providing a platform to build multicultural understanding, thereby bridging religious and other barriers to build an empowered and peaceful community.

The context

Mumbai (Bombay); the city of dreams, is an immense urban agglomeration of approximately 20 million people. It is well known that about 60% of its population lives in slums, occupying merely 8% of the land in the island city, suggesting the enormous amounts of disparity and marginalization in the 'city of dreams'. The cycle of marginalization and the consequent deprivation continues to tie the slum dweller to the unfortunate circumstances that they are born into. In the daily struggle for two square meals, mean that even the children also work to add to the income and hence leaves no chance for the young kids to escape the vicious cycle. Life in the slum settlements in Mumbai has further deteriorated with the emergence of communal hostility and since has divided its fragile existence on religious lines.

The idea

The concept of 'Travelling' Peace through mobile libraries came from the idea of the infrastructure going to the neediest and not the other way around. The mobile library, refurbished from an unused bus! (removed of its engines), will house books and go to the selected slum settlements in the city to conduct the program. The mobility will ensure easy access to until now inaccessible locations and people. The concept of recycling junk metal frames is the best possible option where the need is acute, time is short and to even imagine conventional infrastructure is impossible. The recyclability here is a salute to the people in the slums of Bombay who use the same informal means and methods to survive.

Project description

The goal of the project

Through the Davis Peace Project, I aim to address the issues of "lack of access". Access, to "information", to "education", to the "know how" of leading a better, healthier living. The project will be an "opportunity to interact" with the 'others' in the community; to bring an end to the antagonisms and segregation that followed the riots of 1992-93. Hence allow for "access to peace and harmony" in the religious or otherwise segregated communities. The Mobile library is only a metaphor for the holistic approach to a 2 weeklong camps in both the slums of *Dharavi* and *Jogeshwari*,² which will address and attract students to books, elders to commune and break invisible barriers to build peace.

The phases of the project

¹ Tentative Design Scheme is attached to the proposal

² Slum settlements in Mumbai. One of the many epicenters of 1992-93 riots

Stage 1: Preliminary research and fabricating the substructure (1 month)

- To fabricate a mobile library according to the proposal with help of local labor
- Preliminary survey and understanding the needs of the community

Stage 2: Spreading the 'message' and developing the program (1 month)

- Recruit participants, of all age groups from the community
- Deciding on the target groups and development of the program

Stage 3: The month long camp first in *Dharavi* and then in *Jogeshwari* (1 month, divided into two)

- To provide a comprehensive vocational program for children! teenagers of all age groups
- Invite speakers from various NGOs and local public institutions to address 'core' issues
- The help the community organize, support and empower themselves

The methodology

Travelling peace project will kick start in two parallel stages, Stage 1 and Stage 2. By the end of which the program will have basic infrastructure, requirements and logistics worked out with help of Mumbai based NGOs like NSDF, SPARC³. These NGOs play a crucial role as mediators⁴, with whose help the program will be developed by synthesizing the needs and requirements of the community with that of the main goals of the program. In the subsequent execution stage, the speakers will be welcomed from NGOs and public institutions in the vicinity whose involvement will boost the confidence of people. Thereafter, the message of the program will be passed through posters and announcements highlighting the incentives of being a part of the program, like access to books, vocational training, various lectures on health, hygiene etc and last but not the least; fun and frolic in the form of performances, art classes and nutritious food for the participants. There will be a final presentation at the end of the month long camp and an art exhibition of the students in the art class instructed by Aravind Dnni⁵. Finally, a group of active participants from the camp and community elders will form an association to keep the ideals of education, empowerment and peace.

The results

By believing in the philosophy that "Education IS Freedom" and everyone deserves an opportunity to live with dignity and peace, It will be my humble attempt through this program to kindle the fire for knowledge in the mind of youngsters in the community, who otherwise have no access to formal education. Fully knowing that this small intervention is hardly going to make up for the lack of infrastructure in slums, but I hope through the project we bring out the collective spirit among the slum dwellers to bridge over their circumstances and comeback into the mainstream, Introduction to vocational courses will direct them in the right direction to a better livelihood full of opportunities. For the elders, it will be the chance to interact with everyone in community and to bridge barriers, as well as form future associations in matters dealing with community welfare and peace.

³ NSDF, National Slum Dwellers Federation, SPARC Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centers. ⁴ From my close knowledge of Bombay slums, NGOs are indispensable in such circumstances. . ⁵ Trained as an architect, and aims to employ his passion for art by taking classes