

Empowering Mandals for Slum-Upgrading
A Report for the Gujarat Mahila Housing Sewa Trust

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Forward

Gujarat Mahila Housing Sewa Trust (MHT) has been a central partner in the Ahmedabad *Parivartan* project (also called the Slum Networking Project or SNP) for more than a decade. *Parivartan* is one frequently studied program for its “best-practices” in which the local government relies heavily on MHT and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to provide infrastructure services to the nearly 40 percent of the city’s population living in slums. Uniquely, the SNP also relies on local *mandals* (community organizations) to act as advocates and as community managers for the provision and maintenance of infrastructure in each neighborhood. Generally, these mandals are unfunded civil society organizations and are affiliated with a local community-development NGO, in this case MHT.

The work of MHT for slum upgrading in Ahmedabad had been positively evaluated by other researchers, however, little was known about the long-term success and capabilities of the mandals created in the local neighborhoods. I was told about MHT’s interests in learning more about the state of the mandals when I first visited Ahmedabad in March, 2008. As a result of these meetings, I chose to research MHT mandals as part of my doctoral dissertation as a student at the University of California, Los Angeles.

I returned to Ahmedabad in January 2009, and with the help of MHT and SEWA Research Academy conducted a survey of over 200 leaders of MHT mandals. The mandals selected had all been registered for at least three years and had helped to successfully bring needed social services (such as water, sanitation, street paving, and drainage) to their neighborhoods. In this sense, then, these mandals were already successful associations.

The purpose of the data gathered via the survey of mandal leaders is to provide additional knowledge regarding the state of these associations as of 2009. The following pages review key information gathered from this survey that I hope will be valuable to MHT and to the community leaders with whom they work. I am thankful for the opportunity to have worked with and learned from the many staff and fieldworkers who make up the MHT team.

Sincerely,

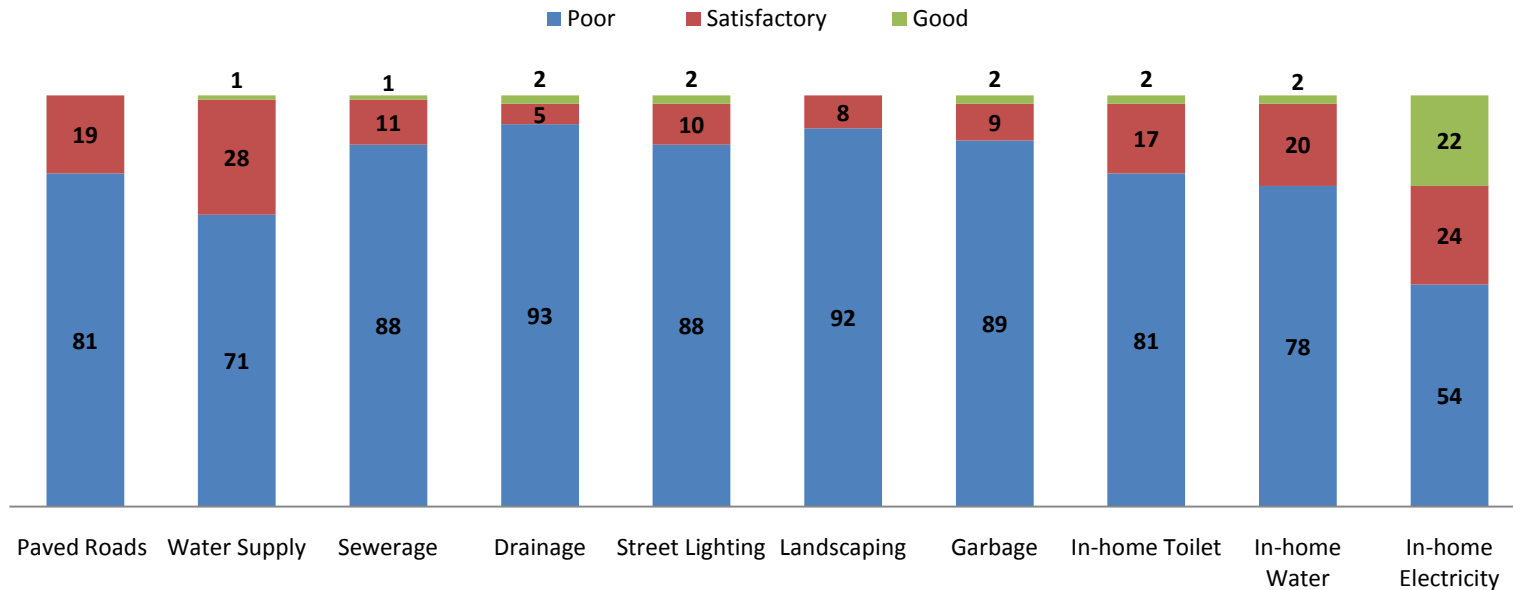


Laura Russ, Ph.D.

1. What was life like in neighborhoods before Parivartan?

The survey revealed that residents of *Parivartan* neighborhoods had very low levels of services before the program began and few had access to many basic social and infrastructure services. Many women surveyed commented how important the *Parivartan* project was for their self-respect, safety, and for the convenience of having household-level services. 72 percent of those surveyed report very high levels of satisfaction with the project.

Chart 1. Service Quality before *Parivartan*



Positive Feedback on *Parivartan* from Mandal Leaders

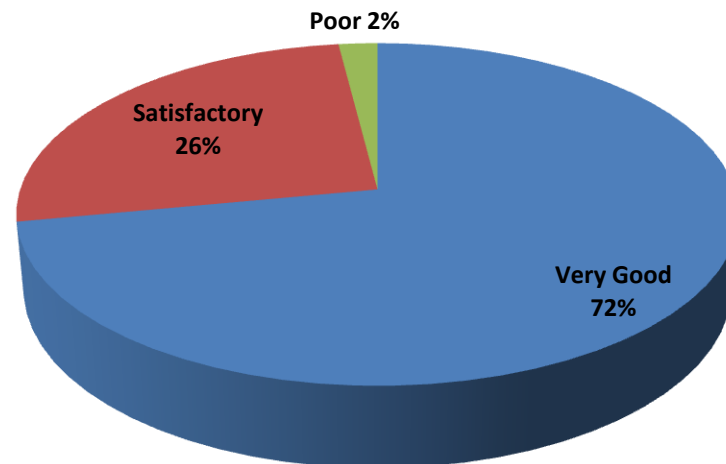
“Now we feel very good. Before making toilet at home, when we went for toilet outside, we feel so much ashamed of car drivers and truck drivers, but now we feel great relief and we have toilet at every home.”

“We feel better than before because our whole days were spoiled by managing all these things, but now that we have received all the facilities it saves our time.”

“Our area was dirty before, but now it is clean and we have water facilities. Now we do not have to suffer.”

“Because of all the facilities we receive ... more guests now come to visit our home.”

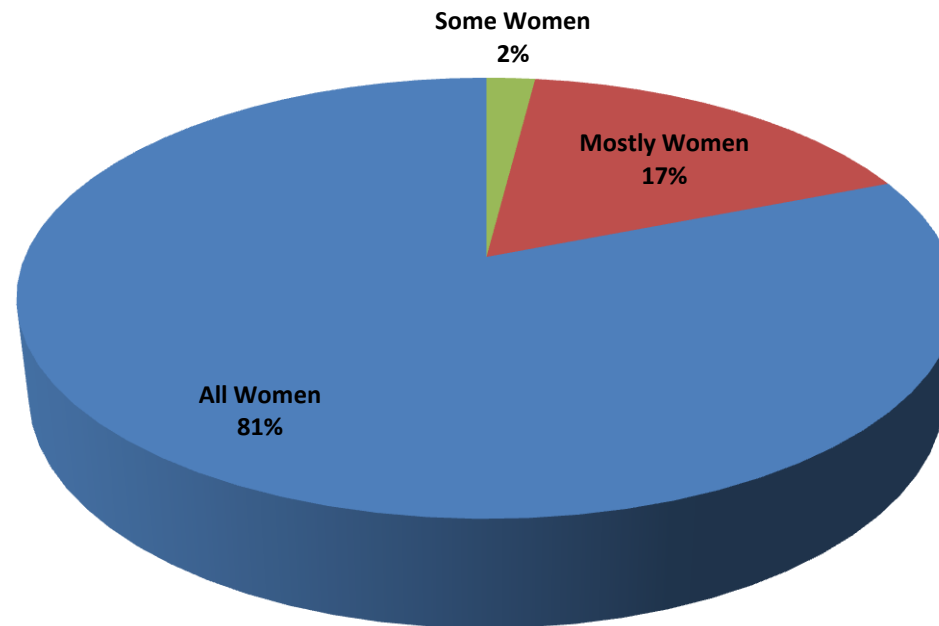
Chart 2. Quality of Services after *Parivartan*



2. Who participates in the mandals?

The vast majority (81%) of the MHT-affiliated mandals for the *Parivartan* project are all women. Approximately 20 percent of women, however, report their groups have some male participants. This suggests that MHT has remained true to its mission of working to empower women through housing and infrastructure services. It also suggests that some men do participate as leaders, either in an official or unofficial capacity.

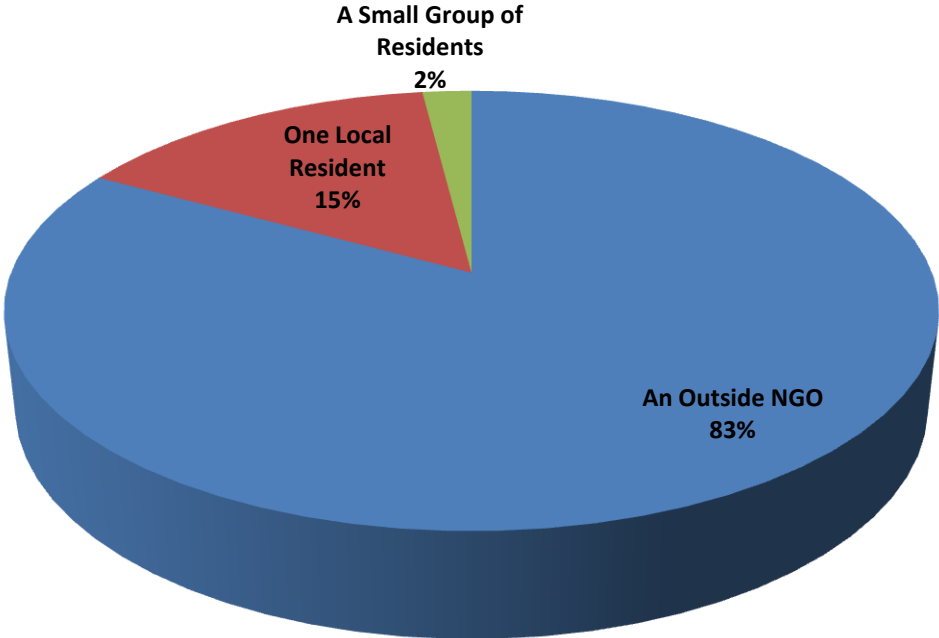
Chart 3. Proportion of Women Participants



3. How were the mandals created?

Most respondents (83%) report that their mandal was created by an NGO, in this case by MHT. Fifteen percent report their mandal was established by a local resident and an additional two percent report the mandal was started by a group of local residents. This illustrates that most mandal leaders give significant credit to MHT for establishing their organizations.

Chart 4. Organization or Person Founding the Mandal

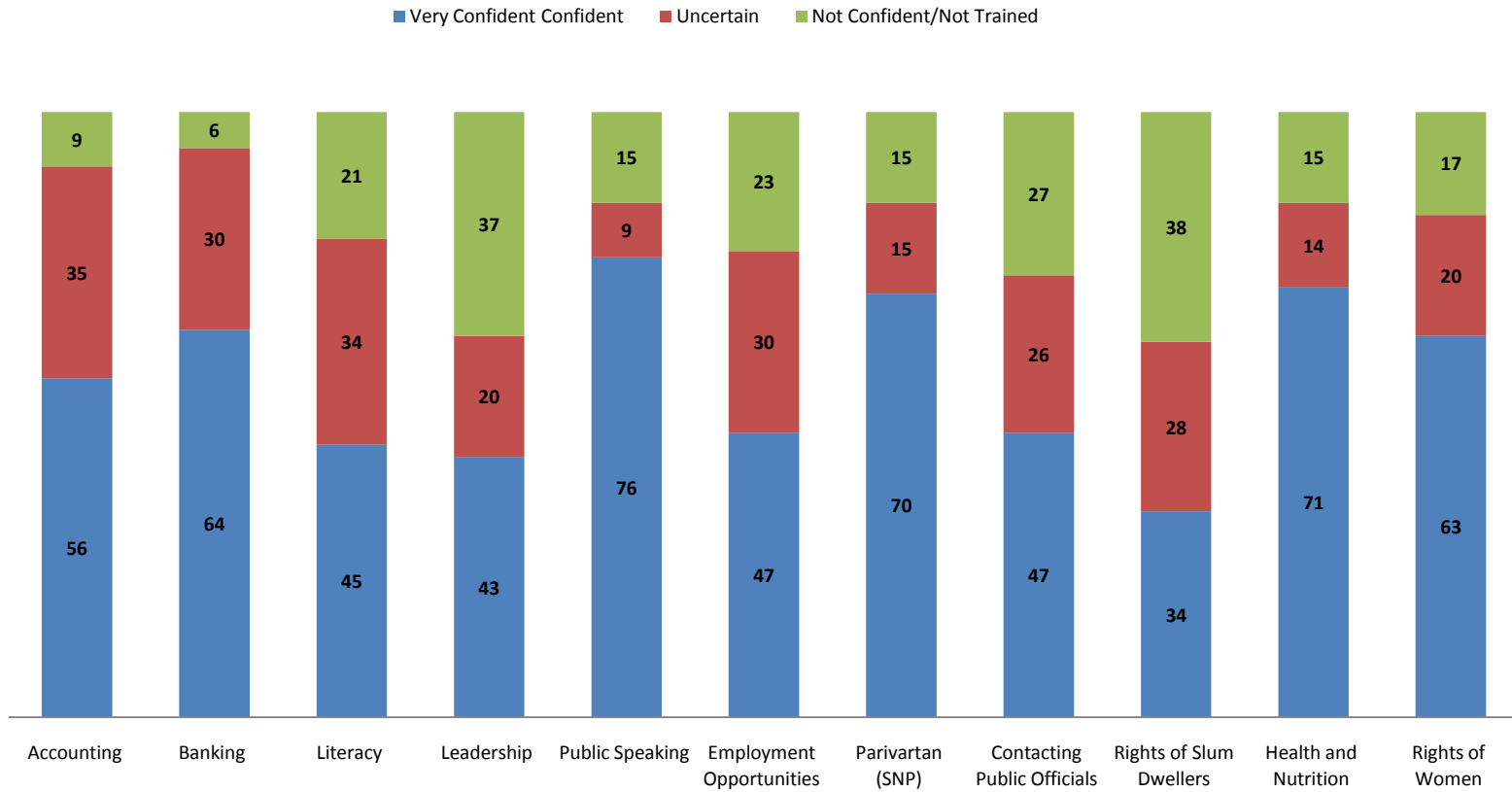


4. What kind of training did mandal leaders receive?

Ninety-six percent of mandal leaders report receiving training by MHT for the *Parivartan* program. As a result of training, 71 percent are confident in their knowledge of health and nutrition, 63 percent are confident in their knowledge of women's rights, 76 percent report improved public speaking skills, and perhaps most important, 70 percent report confidence in knowledge of the *Parivartan* program.

Despite these positive results, the respondents were not as confident in other skills important to the ongoing management of their organizations. For example, only 45 percent of the respondents reported being confidently literate as a result of their training. In addition, only 43 percent report they are confident in their leadership skills. And just over half (53%) report they are confident with accounting. Further, only 34 percent are confident in their knowledge of the rights of slum dwellers. Each of these types of knowledge and skills are very important for the day to day management of the mandals, and reveals important areas where leaders may require additional training.

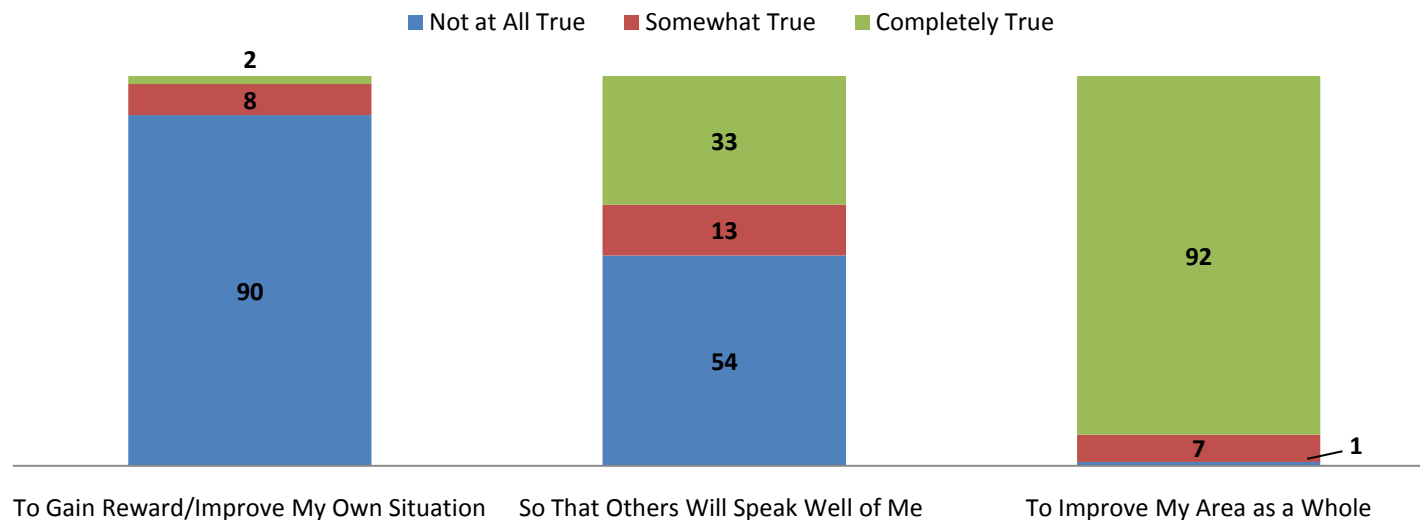
Chart 5. Confidence in Basic Skills as a Result of Mandal Training



5. Why do women participate in mandals?

Generally speaking, most women report participating in a *Parivartan* mandal in order to improve their neighborhood overall. This is not surprising given that the intent of the *Parivartan* program is to provide basic physical infrastructure and social services in the neighborhoods. In addition, women also report participating to improve their reputation and so that others will “speak well” of them. In other words, women feel that others will consider them in high regard if they participate. This shows that women are sensitive to how others view them and that they believe others will approve of them for participating. Despite being concerned with their reputation, women rarely reported participating to gain reward or to improve their individual situation. Of note, some respondents may have been reluctant to admit participating for their own self-interest and as a result may have been more likely to report altruistic motivation. Despite this, it is clear that women participants aspire to be seen as representatives of the collective neighborhood and not only their individual interests.

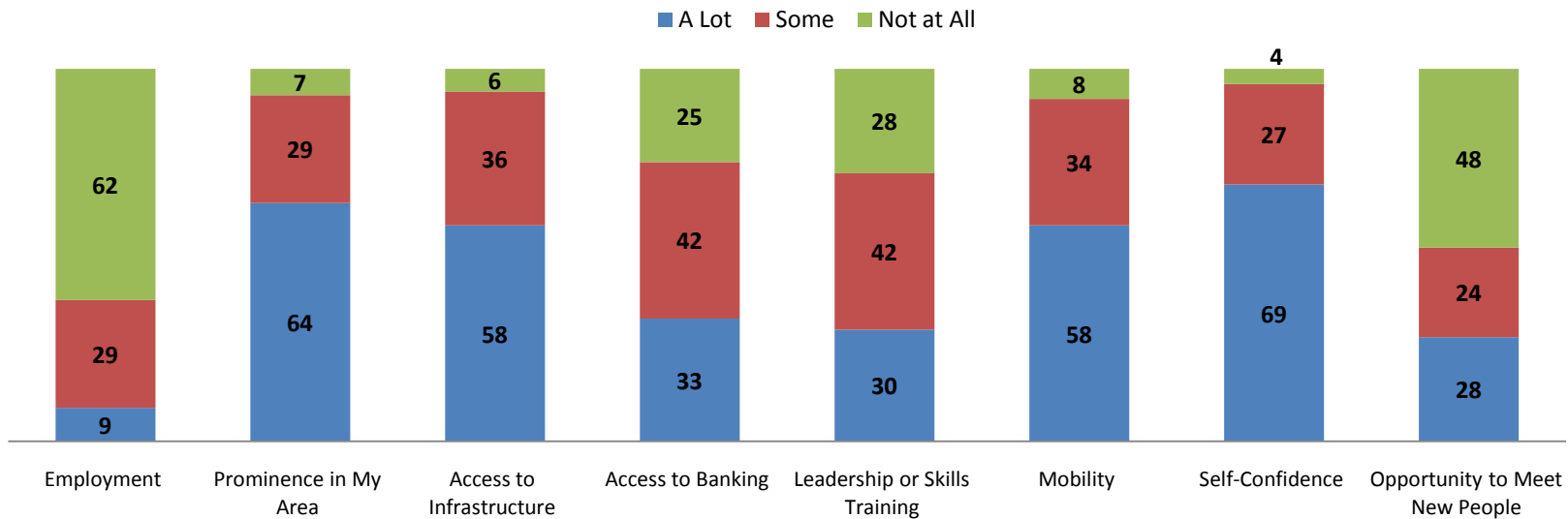
Chart 6. Motivations to Participate



6. How do women benefit from being part of a mandal?

The chart below shows a breakdown of the types of benefits women receive as a result of being a mandal leader. Not all women report benefitting from mandal participation. The most commonly perceived benefit was increased self-confidence with 96 percent of respondents reporting an increase of “some” or “a lot”. Additionally other benefits most commonly reported by respondents are increased mobility (58% “a lot”, 34% “some”), increased prominence in the neighborhood (64% “a lot”, 29% “some”) and – not surprisingly – increased access to infrastructure (58% “a lot”, 36% “some”). Interestingly although access to infrastructure is a commonly perceived benefit of participation, women perceive other social benefits as being equally important. This suggests that women participate in the MHT-affiliated *Parivartan* mandals not only because of the direct benefit of improved infrastructure but also via indirect social benefits such as improved mobility and self-confidence.

Chart 7. Benefits of Mandal Participation



7. How are mandals managed?

Despite being trained by MHT in how to manage their organizations, mandal participants do not uniformly report formal, transparent and accountable management processes. For example, most respondents report that the mandal president is responsible for taking meeting minutes and for maintaining financial records. While this suggests that mandals are making an effort at managing their organizations with certain formal procedures in place, it also suggests that in many mandals the president is taking on the bulk of the formal managerial roles, rather than delegating such tasks to a secretary or treasurer.

Chart 8. Individual Responsible for Taking Meeting Minutes

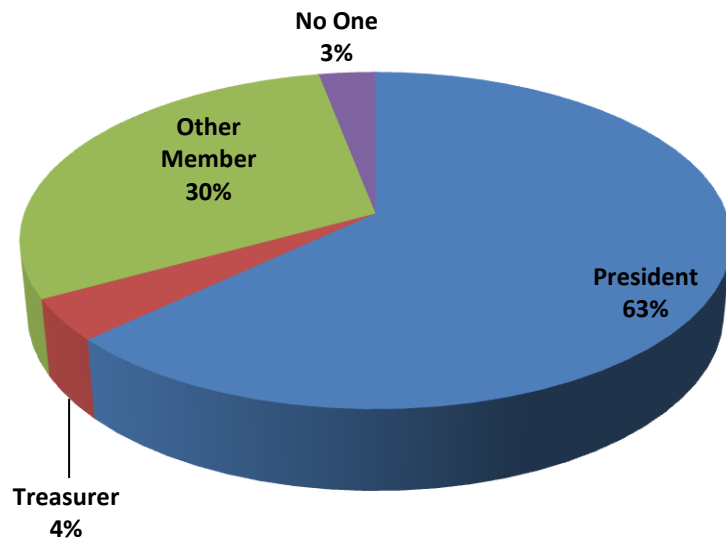
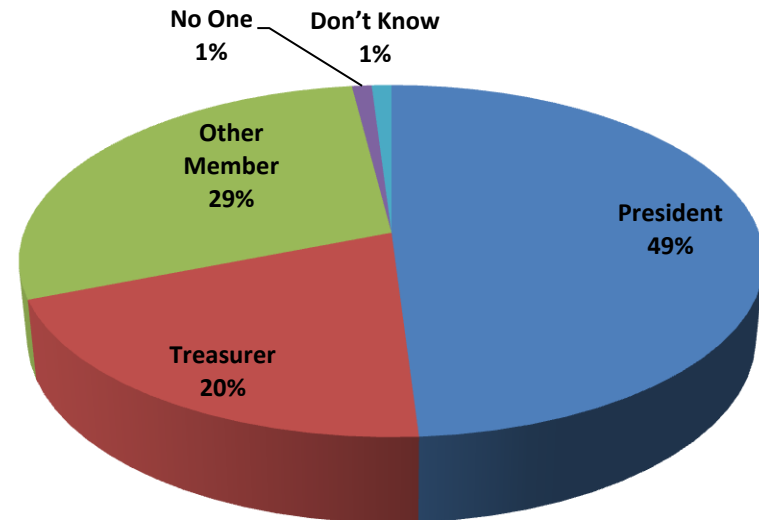


Chart 9. Individual Responsible for Maintaining Financial Records



In addition, the selection of leaders and decision-making power of individual respondents within mandals varies. Responses are quite positive with regard to leadership effectiveness and democratic selection of leaders. For example, 60 percent of respondents report high satisfaction with leadership effectiveness and an additional 38 percent report leadership is satisfactory. In addition, most respondents report democratic systems in place for leader selection with 51 percent reporting that leaders are elected by a vote of all members and an additional 41 percent reporting that a small group of leaders makes the decision.

Chart 10. Leadership Effectiveness

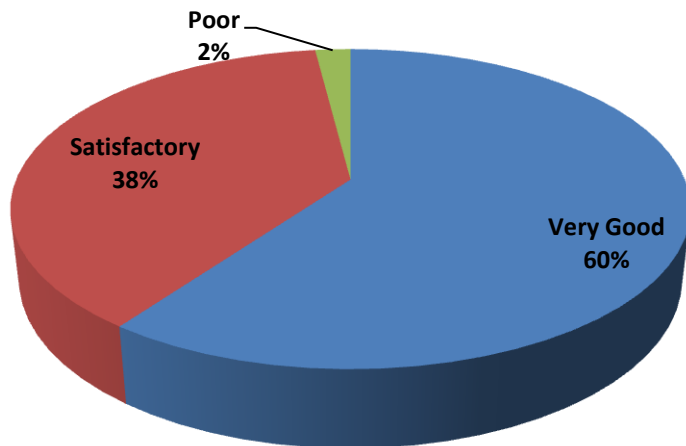
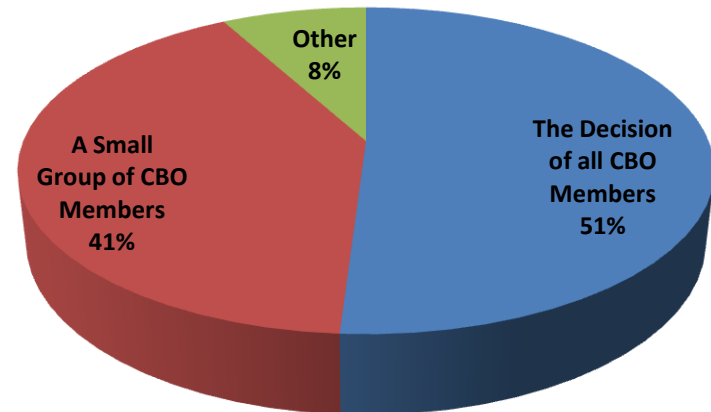


Chart 11. Method of Leadership Selection



Despite confidence in leadership, however, decision-making and knowledge of rules and regulations are quite limited. For example, 72 percent of respondents report that MHT is responsible for most major decision-making for the mandal including what tasks the mandal will undertake, when to contact the municipality for assistance, and how to manage mandal finances. In addition, few respondents report having control over decisions within the mandal, with 34 percent reporting having “no control” and an additional 43 percent reporting only “some control” over the decisions of the mandal. These data suggest that although mandal participants perceive leadership to be effective and leadership selection to be democratic, on a day to day basis few members are actively participating in making decisions within their organization.

Chart 12. Control Over Mandal Decisions

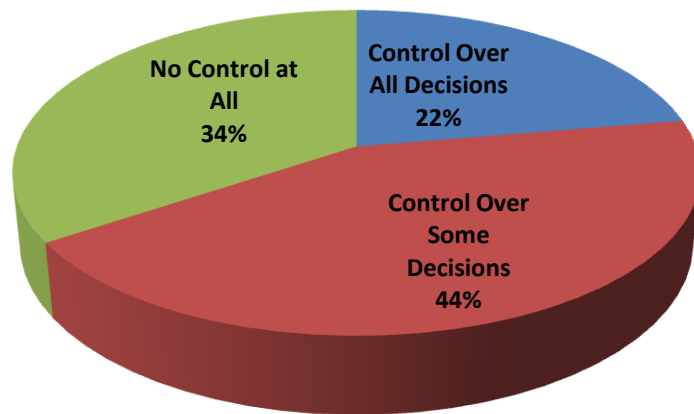
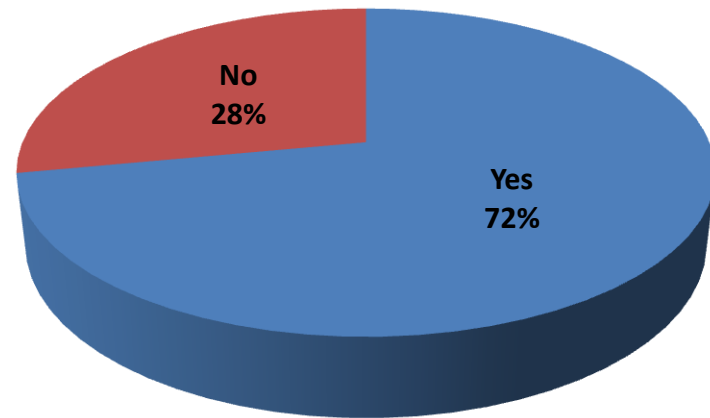


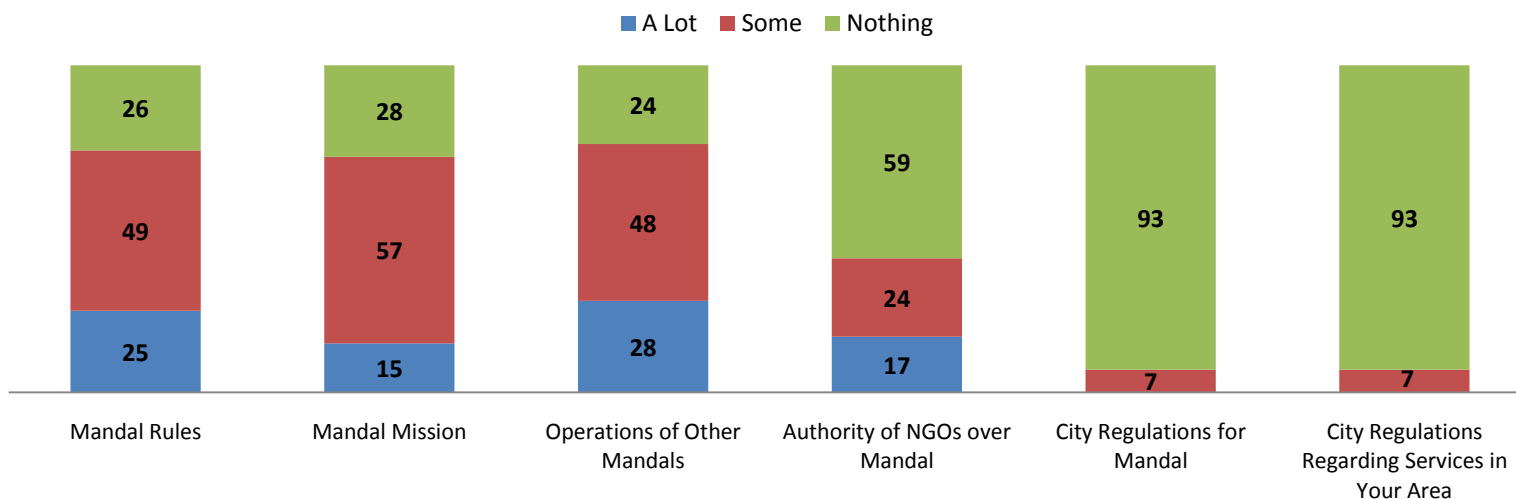
Chart 13. MHT Makes All Major Decisions for Mandal



In addition few mandal members are confident in their knowledge of specific rules and regulations governing their organization and related infrastructure services. Generally speaking, most mandal members report knowing “a lot” or “some” about the rules of their own mandal (25% know “a lot”, 49% know “some”), the group’s mission (15% know “a lot”, 57% know “some”), and how other mandals operate (28% know “a lot”, 48% know “some”). Knowledge declines sharply, however, when it comes to rules and regulations outside of the mandal. For example, only 17 percent of respondents report knowing “a lot” about the authority of MHT over their organization while an additional 24 percent report knowing “some” about this. Knowledge declines sharply, however, when it comes to rules and regulations outside of the mandal. For example, only 17 percent of respondents report knowing “a lot” about the authority of MHT over their organization while an additional 24 percent report knowing “some” about this.

Very few respondents report knowing anything about city rules governing their mandal or regarding services in the area – in both cases 93 percent of respondents report knowing “nothing” about these rules and regulations. These results point to an important shortcoming in mandal knowledge and management capacity. It is necessary for mandals to understand how rules outside of their neighborhood may affect their mandals ability to provide and maintain infrastructure and social services in the area.

Chart 14. Knowledge of Rules/Regulations Governing Mandal

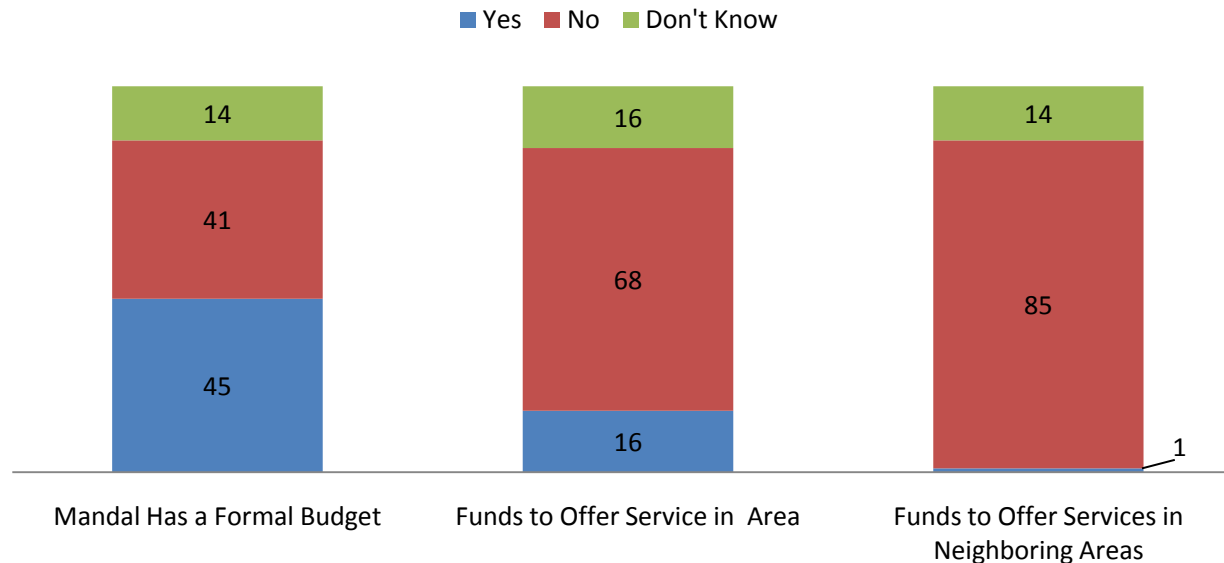


8. How are mandals financed?

Mandals for the most part have very low financial capacity, both in terms of knowledge about finances and with regard to access to financial resources. For example, only 45 percent of respondents report that mandals have a formal budget. Perhaps more tellingly a full 14 percent do not know whether the group has a budget or not suggesting that there is a significant lack of knowledge with regard to financial operations within the mandals.

Additionally, respondents report very limited access to financial resources. Only 16 percent report having access to adequate resources to offer services in their area and only one percent report having access to offer services in neighboring areas.

Chart 15. Financial Knowledge and Access



9. How effective are mandals?

Mandals are generally effective with regard to service provision, and ability to advocate for assistance on behalf of the neighborhood. For example, according to respondents almost all mandals are offering at least one service in their area. Ninety-four percent of respondents report that their mandal offers banking services and 74 percent report offering health services. These services are likely being offering in partnership with MHT or another SEWA affiliate. However the responses suggest mandal leaders feel they are actively participating in the provision of these services in their neighborhoods.

Despite a high proportion of mandals offering at least one service in their area, few report meeting on a regular basis. Results of the survey indicate that only half (49%) of respondents report meeting in the six months prior to the survey. Of those that did meet in the prior six months, 32 percent reported meeting one to three times in that six-month period, 8 percent reported meeting four to six times, and nine percent reported meeting more than six times.

Chart 16. Services Offered By/Through Mandal

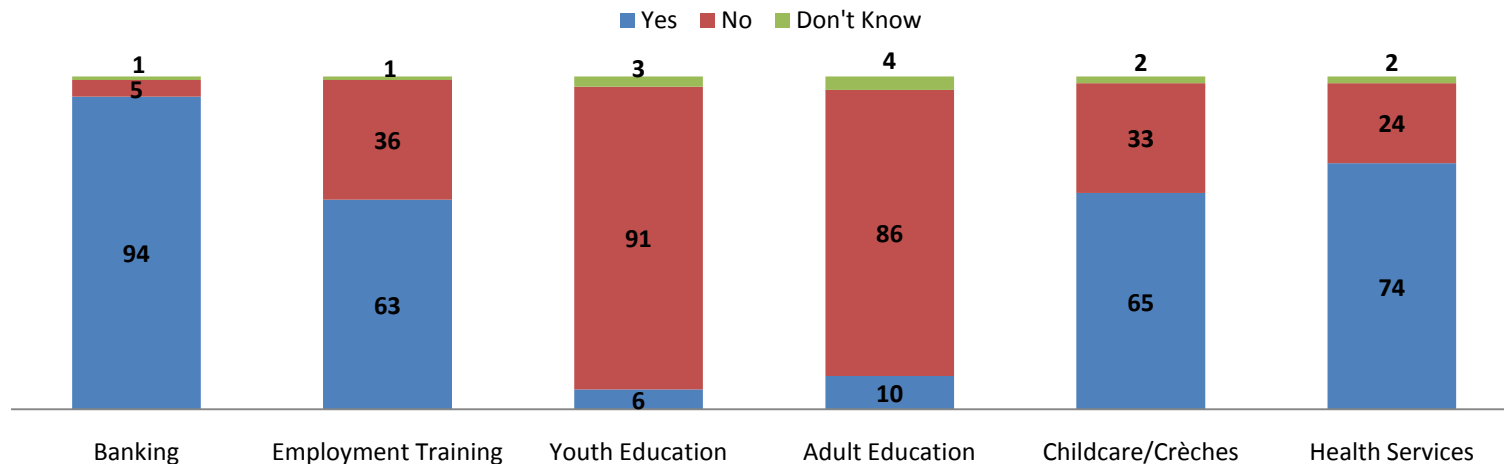
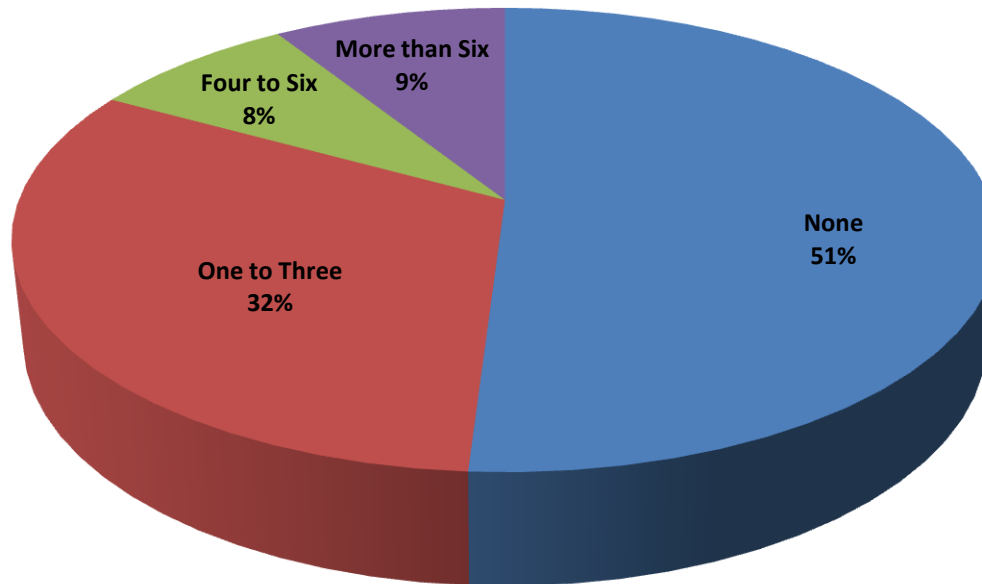


Chart 17. Number of Meetings Held in Past Six Months



Mandal effectiveness refers not only to whether the groups meet regularly and provide services to their area, but also to how well the organizations are able to lobby outside the area for service maintenance and improvement, in particular with the municipality. The charts below show how regularly respondents report the mandals contact the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) to request services in their areas. These services range in scope from funding or technical support to area and city-wide service improvements.

Only five percent of respondents report they contact the AMC “regularly” to request funding or technical assistance, although an additional 27 percent report requesting these services “sometimes”. In contrast, 40

percent report contacting the AMC “regularly” to improve conditions in the area and an additional 40 percent report doing so “sometimes”. Similarly, 41 percent of respondents report they contact the AMC regularly for the purpose of “improving conditions for slum dwellers as a whole” and an additional 37 percent do so “sometimes”. This suggests that mandals are active as needed to make sure their neighborhoods are maintained.

Chart 18. Times Mandal Has Approached AMC (in the last 12 months)

