Kate Sharber  
Tonya Experience Summer 2011  
CURE India

This summer I spent one month in Agra and New Delhi, India working with Centre for Urban and Regional Excellence (CURE), an NGO focused on creating an enabling environment for the urban poor. I learned from CURE how important it is to have the urban poor involved in the policies that impact them. By having the residents of the slum communities themselves identify their issues and prioritize them, CURE is able to provide the appropriate skills and basic tools as well as mobilize the poor to have the passion to alleviate their own poverty rather than rely on charity.

While in Agra, I worked with CURE to create development policies for the 44% of the city’s population living in slum conditions. My role was to observe the physical conditions in slum communities and report on the correlation between social and physical problems. When social problems, such as caste, religious, and gender differences dominate the dynamics of the slum communities, members of the communities are less likely to forge together to try to improve physical problems.

In my two weeks in the New Delhi office of CURE, I studied the challenges of rehabilitating a slum community relocated 40 km from Delhi to a village that was overwhelmed with the influx of new impoverished families. The villagers and the members of the resettlement colony face many issues as they must deal with integration of different groups of people, inequality in the dispersion of government and non-government benefits, and the overall discomforts of poverty. NGOs like CURE work in this community to help provide social infrastructure skills that will allow people to improve physical infrastructure on their own rather than relying on handouts.

I went to India with expectations of making immediate and substantial changes in the communities in which I would be working. But, I learned that the process of helping the poor depends on being patient and allowing long-term development practices to become established. Through my experience, I was not only able to begin to comprehend the inner workings of NGOs but I also began to understand the reality of poverty in the third world and that direct charity with no community engagement is not a sustainable way of development and only perpetuates the cycle of poverty.