



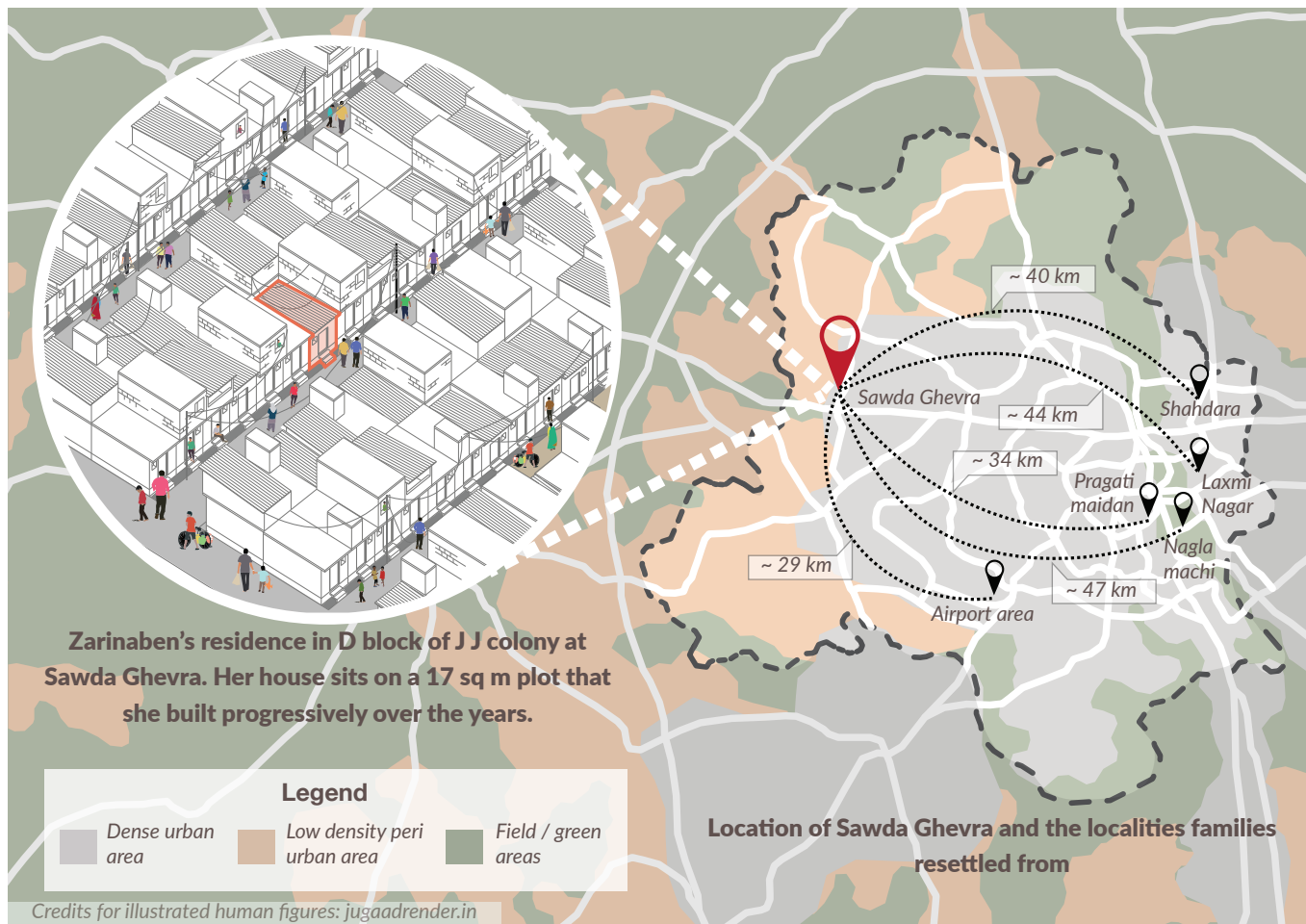
## Rebuilding a home – and a life

Zarinaben, Sawda Ghevra Resettlement Colony, Delhi

### About Zarinaben

Zarinaben is a resident of D-block in Sawda Ghevra, a resettlement colony on the outskirts of Delhi. It is home to five thousand families who were originally from different parts of Delhi including Pragati Maidan, Yamuna Nagar, Lakshmi Nagar, and the airport area. Before moving to Sawda, Zarinaben lived in Shahdara Indira Camp, a neighborhood in East Delhi well-connected to the city and with access to all the basic household and community services. However, in 2006, her family was forced to move to Sawda, with the onset of the metro construction. This colony was located outside the western edge of the city. They were given only an open plot of land with no network connection to the city or even essential services. Zarinaben left her home-based work to take care of her household and make a new life in this distant location. Over the years, the community progressed with the efforts of individual households. Mahila

Housing SEWA Trust (MHT) facilitated in bringing services like electricity, water, and sanitation, along with training women to work with the government bodies. Today, Zarinaben lives with her family, including her husband, three children, a daughter-in-law, and two grandchildren, in a single room house. She also works as a home-based worker tailoring clothes, nurse gowns, and masks. With her drive to uplift her community, Zarinaben has demonstrated personal growth as a woman community leader and the president of the only Residents' Welfare Association (RWA) in Sawda. She is often seen at the forefront of engaging with the government, resolving community issues, and empowering other women in her community.



## A piece of land to start a new life

Zarina's family was one among the many that were evicted and relocated to Sawda to make space for new sporting facilities and other infrastructure, like the Metro rail, in preparation of the Commonwealth Games. This resettlement colony ghettoed 40 km (25 miles) outside Delhi forced the residents to move to poor living conditions. In place of a secure and formal house, they were merely provided with undeveloped plots at a burdensome financial cost, without ownership rights, and located away from the city. When the officials issued slips for identification purposes, a map was shown to them which indicated their allotted land among rows of empty plots with only internal roads. The government offered the families plots of size 3.6 m x 3 m and 5.5 m x 3 m (depending on the year when the ration cards were issued), on a ten-year lease at a cost of INR 7,000 (USD 94). Additionally, the residents had to bear the entire responsibility of building houses for themselves and bringing facilities like water, sanitation, food and basic supplies, transport, electricity, healthcare, and education. Zarinaben started by constructing a makeshift shelter for her family.

## Living without essential services

In Sawda, fights between families for water were common since only two water tankers came on alternate days. Their locality had no toilets, which forced the residents to use the fields nearby for defecation. Theft, beating, molestation, and rapes characterized this area and women's safety was always of utmost concern. The community remained filthy, with no clean water, drainage or waste collection.

Additionally, moving to Sawda also meant that the residents had to travel long distances for work daily, or look for jobs closer to their new homes. Only two buses operated from Sawda, missing which meant that they lost a day's pay. In the absence of employment opportunities, several families sold their allotted plot in the grey market and went back to the city in search of rented shelter. Many battling poverty lost their jobs. Women resorted to home-based work like mala making, shoe strap cutting, stitching, and running a shop from home, even though they still struggled to find work. Zarinaben recalls how the lack of mobility made it difficult to connect with the market and forced them to expend additional cost and time into travel for work or getting even the basic supplies. In the initial period, she had to give up her work and focus solely on procuring basic facilities for her family.

**“We were forced to leave the city and move to Sawda. There was nothing around. No water. No buses. No houses. We have put a lot of effort to build a home here and work with our community for even basic services. But we still struggle to get clear land titles and we are unable to take formal bank loans for upgradations.”**

### Improving living standards and expanding work space

Over the years, Zarinaben and her family spent around INR 70,000 (USD 941) from their savings to build a single-room house on their allotted plot. Their immediate need on moving to Sawda was to ensure a shelter above their head, even if it was temporary. She used metal sheets and scaffolds to build a house and accommodate everyone in her family. Soon after, she started building her house brick by brick and started her tailoring work to add to the family income.

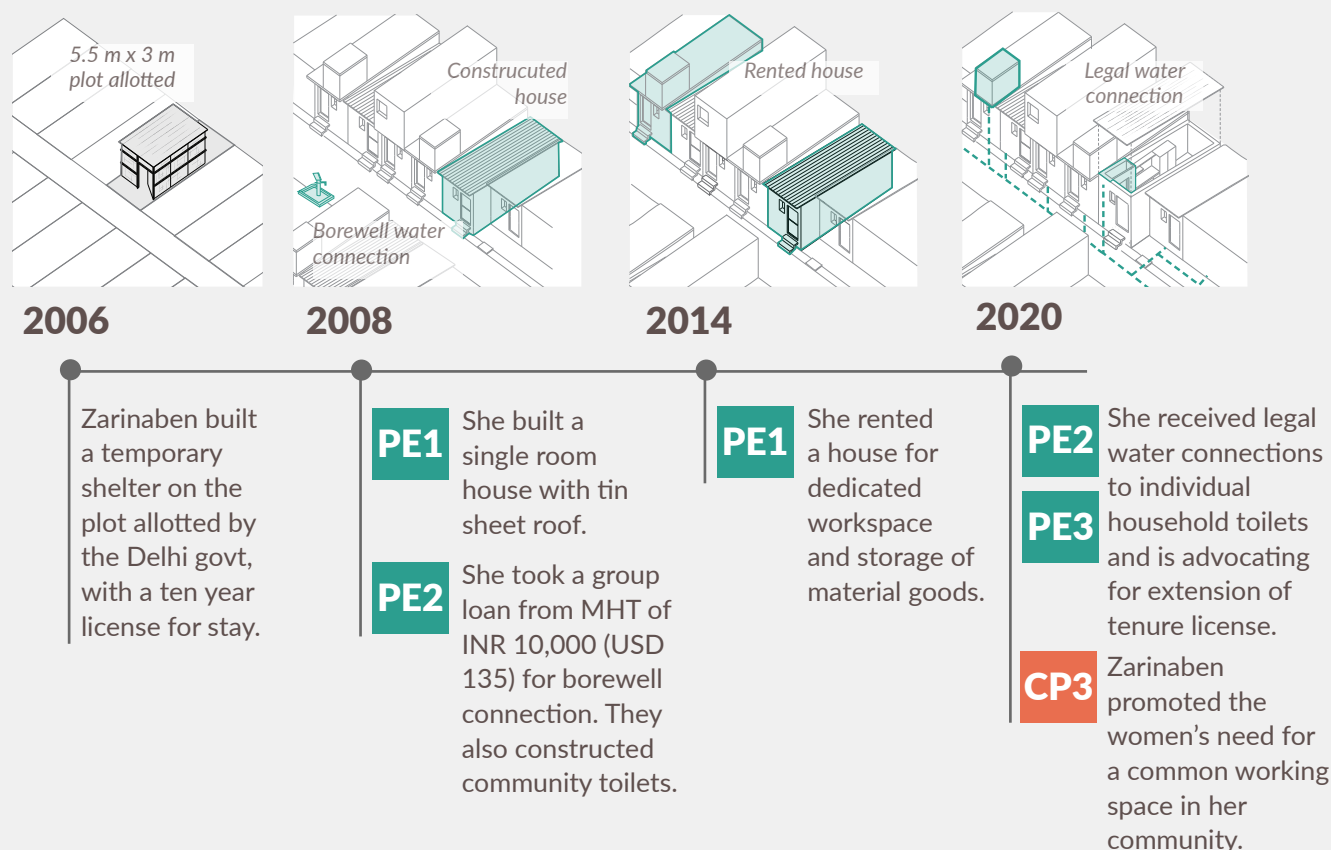
Initially, Zarinaben struggled to work from a single room that she had to share with eight people. Her household activities overlapped with her tailoring tasks, subsequently hampering her ability to dedicate continuous hours for work. To improve their work productivity, they rented a room three houses away from their home, where they work and store material goods. Some of her family members have also joined her in making medical gowns, kits, masks, and other products. With many women engaged in different types of home-based work in Sawda, Zarinaben and others have benefited from the network of contractors and employers who collect raw materials and even deliver the finished products. Her husband and her son have also found welding jobs not very far from their home.

Zarinaben is happy that her decision to expand her working space has boosted her home-based tailoring work and improved her income substantially. She asserts that she will build a second floor very soon to make room for her growing family.

### Leading women action groups to avail basic infrastructure services

In 2008, MHT started working in Sawda and began to understand the concerns of the community. The community identified that the lack of access to water

#### Timeline of Zarinaben’s house improvements



was their primary concern. In the absence of any piped water network, the community had to rely on groundwater. MHT formed small loan groups and lent them INR 10,000 (USD 135) to install submersible pumps and access groundwater. This triggered further improvements, with the residents soon getting legal electricity connections, and sanitation improvements. MHT also supported individual households to construct private toilets. They extended housing loans and also provided construction training to a hundred and fifty women.

All the while, MHT focused on developing the social capital by building awareness, training programs and forming Community Action Groups (CAGs). Zarinaben demonstrated an active interest in resolving her community's issues by raising urgent concerns, and soon became the leader of her CAG. After multiple attempts to approach the local government authorities, she soon realized that when she went alone her requests were overlooked. The women then used the collective strength of the CAG to negotiate and drive action while working with the officials. The CAG has also started working more independently, identifying community issues and taking them to the local government. More recently, the CAG celebrated its success in bringing legal water connections and installing street lights for the neighborhood. They worked tirelessly, submitting applications for street cleaning and waste collection services, and making their community cleaner. Zarinaben claims that the community now has the attention of their local government official through the CAG, which has built the community's identity and given them a voice to persistently ask for their needs.

### **Participating in planning as rightful citizens**

Zarinaben's community also participated in the Main Bhi Delhi campaign, a people's campaign to make planning in Delhi more representative and inclusive by engaging citizens in the 2041 Master Plan process. As the leader of the CAG group, she recalls that after multiple rounds of public consultation meetings, the campaign team and her community collectively identified their needs for sewerage lines, better roads, bus stops, co-ed colleges, and hospitals. During their consultation with the campaign's field experts, the residents concluded that a dedicated community-level working space for home-based workers with a local market to sell their products will benefit them.

### **An uncertain future**

As her community progressed from its hostile environment, Zarinaben also grew in her role as a community leader. As the president of the only RWA,

she plays an instrumental role in persistent advocacy for her community's basic citizen rights.

**“My RWA was actively involved in the Main Bhi Dilli campaign. We attended public meetings and, after discussion with our community, we gave several inputs for infrastructure development. To help all home based-workers we suggested common worksheds, storage facilities and provisions for easier access to markets that will improve our working conditions and means of livelihoods.”**

Zarinaben holds that MHT's training has helped her advance the community's demands with the government officials.

Her initial engagement in working with women gave her the confidence and the will to raise her voice for the community.

Zarinaben has come a long way from a makeshift shelter to a house with a reliable electricity connection, an attached toilet, and a legal water connection, but she still worries about her security. Threat of a second eviction looms large. The residents of Sawda have only been accorded a limited tenure in the form of a ten-year license. The now expired lease is an impediment for the entire community to make further investments in their houses. MHT has been supporting Zarinaben and her RWA to advocate for an extension of this license and for this demand to be included as their key response to Delhi's Master Plan.

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