

Mumbai-based NGO wins Curry Stone Design Prize Vision Award

Since its establishment, SPARC has worked towards creating processes — including a successful savings scheme driven by women living on pavements — to enable the urban poor to be recognised as empowered citizens.

March 18, 2016
Pooja Pillai

A city-based NGO, Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centers (SPARC), has been honoured with the prestigious Curry Stone Design Prize Vision Award for 2016. SPARC, which was founded by Sheela Patel in 1984 to fight for the housing rights of pavement dwellers, was presented with the US \$50,000 prize at a ceremony held on Thursday at the National Gallery of Modern Art.

Since its establishment, SPARC has worked towards creating processes — including a successful savings scheme driven by women living on pavements — to enable the urban poor to be recognised as empowered citizens.

“The award we have won is for our organisational architecture. It gives recognition to processes within institutions that build confidence of women and men living in slums, to create their priorities and voice them with commitments to work with the government to bring in changes,” Patel said.

The Curry Stone Design Prize was founded in 2008 by Clifford Curry and Delight Stone of the Curry Stone Foundation, an Oregon-based charitable body that funds innovative projects that work towards increasing access to shelter, health care, clean air and water, nutrition, education and social justice.

According to Emiliano Gandolfi, the Prize Director, the award given to SPARC recognises the organisation’s work in designing the social framework with which underrepresented populations could have a voice in the decision-making processes that impact their lives.

“Through this prize, we want to encourage people to stop thinking of design in a limited way and to view it as something that can be used to create sustainable solutions for social problems. This is exactly what SPARC has done,” he said.

One of SPARC’s important achievements was in helping slum and pavement dwellers “produce identity” through self-organised census, thus allowing them to acquire identity proofs such as ration cards that would enable them to open bank accounts, enroll their children in schools and receive medical care. The organisation has also worked to involve the communities of the urban poor as proactive stakeholders in the construction of housing meant for them.

SPARC is the second Indian organisation to have won the prize. In 2013, a Bhuj-based collective of professional architects, engineers and environmental advocates called Hunnarshala won the Curry Stone Design Prize for facilitating community-driven, artisan-led reconstruction in Bhuj after the 2001 earthquake.