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Mumbai-based NGO wins \$50,000 'vision prize' for design

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Each year, the Curry Stone Design Prize recognizes projects that use design to address pressing social justice issues. "Societies are more and more polarized between architecture that is making beautiful buildings for the super rich and citizens that are flooding cities, who don't have space to live," explains prize director Emiliano Gandolfi. "One of the missions of the prize is to give attention to designers with a different perspective, who are looking at how to make cities more inclusive."

This year, the "Vision Prize" - awarded only twice in the organization's history - was given to a Mumbai-based NGO, Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centers (SPARC) and its partners, Mahila Milan and the National Slum Dwellers Federation. SPARC's mission is to "support the mobilization and organization" of the urban poor in India and across the developing world; and give them "access to resources to upgrade and formalize settlements".

Over the last 30 years, the organization's director, Sheela Patel, estimates that their work has directly helped about 50,000 people but the policy that came out of their work has had a far greater impact. For instance, during the framing of the SRA scheme, SPARC and its partners contributed by pressing for the inclusion of pavement dwellers.

The winning projects are picked from a large pool of nominations, selected by a rotating team of about 200 global design leaders. A jury, composed of Foundation members and invited global experts, selected SPARC and its partners, who were awarded US \$50,000. "We decided not to give them a normal award but a vision award," said Gandolfi, "because usually we give awards to new practices, but the vision award recognizes ideas that made a difference. SPARC's impact is unheard of, very tangible."