

Now, 23-floor skyscrapers to house slum dwellers

Highrise Living Costly, Experts Fear Further Slumification

Nauzer K Bharucha | TNN

Over two dozen 23-storey buildings in three locations are now the tallest skyscrapers reserved for slum dwellers eligible under the state government's controversial rehabilitation scheme.

While the average Mumbai-ikar has been edged out due to the outrageously high property prices, the slum families will receive their apartments free of cost. But can slum dwellers, used to living at the ground level, adjust to life in a highrise?

Housing experts said this is a "sophisticated displacement plan and a highly unsustainable urban development model that will lead to further slumification of the city". But developers re-housing the families said they are training the slum dwellers for this "cultural transformation".

“The cost of maintenance will shoot up and families (moved to the towers) will find it difficult to survive. The natural tendency is to sell and move to a low-cost area”

Adolf Tragler | HOUSING ACTIVIST

Initially, the scheme mandated seven-storey buildings for rehabilitation. Over the past few years, the Slum Rehabilitation Authority (SRA) allowed buildings twice the height. More recently, it cleared 26 skyscrapers, each 23 floors high, in Malad, Worli and Bhoiwada.

About 6,600 slum families will be relocated into these towers by private developer Omkar and construction firm L&T. Each eligible family is entitled to a free 269 sq ft (carpet) flat. Close to 25,000 slum dwellers will be trained to use the lift, bath rooms and other amenities. "They will have to learn to adapt to these socio-economic changes," said a spokesperson for Omkar.

Under the cross-subsidy SRA scheme, the developer can utilize a portion of the slum plot to

build apartments and sell them at market rate. Development plans of the 23-floor rehabilitation projects show the slum families will be accommodated on less than one-third of the land they earlier occupied. The larger chunk is reserved for apartments and public amenities like recreation grounds.

Austrian-born social worker Adolf Tragler, who settled down in Mumbai five decades ago to help the poor get decent accommodation, said he is not sure if slum dwellers can afford the high maintenance of living in a skyscraper. "The cost of maintenance will shoot up and families will find it difficult to survive. The natural tendency is to sell and move to a low-cost area," he said.

But the Omkar official said each family will receive Rs 20,000 as corpus and the developer will pay to maintain the lift and other facilities for 10 years. SRA chief Nirmalkumar Deshmukh said he has suggested that the mandatory corpus of Rs 20,000 per tenement be doubled.

Tragler estimates 25-30% slum dwellers sell their free houses — despite a rule forbidding sale within 10 years — and move out. In some prime areas of central Mumbai, a rehab flat could fetch anywhere from Rs 60 lakh to Rs 80 lakh. "It's a jackpot for them," said a slum redeveloper.

Housing activist and architect P K Das, who has worked on several slum rehab projects, said slum dwellers are being further squeezed under the guise of redevelopment. "The built-up area for the rehab component and the sale component is equal, but the division of land is highly and unreasonably disproportionate. The smallest ratio of land is allocated for rehabilitation. This had led to higher and higher buildings for slum dwellers," he said.

Das added that such trading of land in real estate business interest under the guise of slum redevelopment is a "blatant bluff". "It pushes thousands to worse living conditions, including danger to their lives arising out of deteriorating highrises and unaffordable management costs," he said.

SLUM TO SKYSCRAPER | REHAB REPORT CARD

Sanctioned SRA schemes
1,285

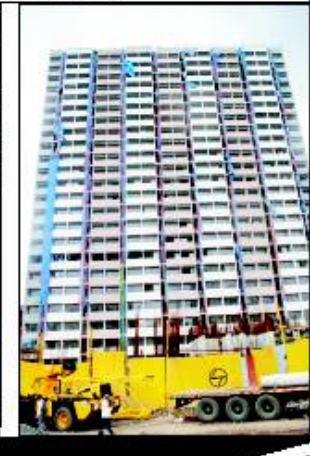
Approved tenements
4,60,687

Allotted tenements
1,54,022

(Source: Slum Rehabilitation Authority)



Some of the 23-floor slum rehab buildings of the Omkar-L&T projects



TRANSITION TRAVAILS

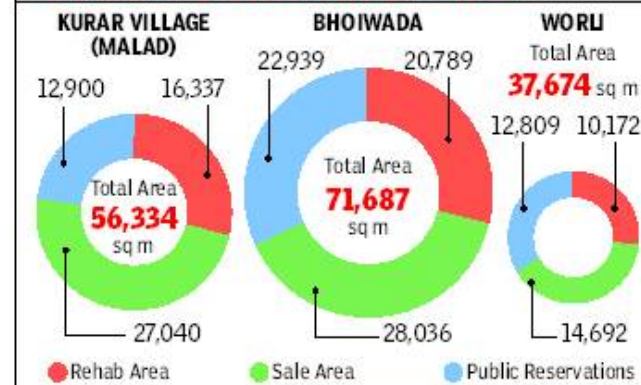
► New tenements in areas like Indira Nagar and Jogeshwari were highly congested, poorly ventilated and located in buildings closely packed together, found an interim report in 2013 of People's Commission on Irregularities and Illegals in SRA projects prepared under Justice H Suresh

► New buildings come with a maintenance cost (roughly Rs 350 per month on an average) which needs factoring into household budgets. Often shoddy construction burdens the society with extensive repairs, plugging of leakages, etc

► SRA buildings often have no common spaces, fragmenting communities which often gathered together during festivities and functions

► Substantial displacement of people. Project delays for years mean many have lived in remote transit camps or rental houses for years affecting their livelihood and children's education

OMKAR-L&T'S 3 PROJECTS UNDER SRA



ELIGIBLE SLUM FAMILIES

2,480
Kurar village (Malad)

2,377
Bhoiwada

1,743
Worli

FLAT GAINS

► Tenements come with a toilet, improving sanitation, hygiene and public health

► Every household gets piped

water, cutting down the time and labour spent, usually by women, on fetching it

► Observers notice that while children in slums usually drop out

in school, many of those who have moved to buildings go on to college

► Living in a building brings an elevation in social status



Slum dwellers check out towers housing their new homes in an SRA project