

# 'Reserve slum lands, not salt pans, for cheap housing'

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Mumbai: One million affordable homes can be created in the city simply by reserving slum lands for affordable housing. The government does not need to step into the eco-sensitive salt pan lands, suggested activist and architect P K Das.

Das, who is the co-founder of Nivara Hakk Suraksha Samiti, has made presentations to both former chief minister Prithviraj Chavan as well as current CM Devendra Fadnavis on how affordable housing can be achieved on government land and with as little as a floor space index (FSI) of 3.

Most slums are all on government land, and when they are on private land, the law requires that the owner surrender the land to the government before it sanctions a slum redevelopment scheme on the plot.

"An integrated and comprehensive planning of over 2,615 hectares of tenable slum occupied land along with restrictions of 30-70 sq m housing units, as in the case of Mhada projects, will enable construction of nearly 10 lakh housing units, besides existing slum-dwellers rehab units," said Das.

The BMC has proposed affordable housing on 642 acres of salt pans and another 5,189 acres of no-development zone land. In NDZ lands, the land owner will be allowed to keep 50% of the permitted FSI, which is proposed to be increased to 2 from the current 0.2 to 0.4. The land owner can avail 35% extra FSI on payment of premium, which takes the total FSI to almost 3.

Pankaj Joshi, architect and executive director of Urban Design Research Institute, asked how would the affordable housing concept be realized, considering there is no public transport, water supply, sanitation networks to these NDZs. "There are already policies that make it mandatory that 20% of all housing on every plot is affordable housing. Earlier, it was applicable for plots that measured 2,000 sqm and now it is applicable to 4,000 sqm plots. Instead, the government should make it mandatory even for 1,000 sqm plots," suggested Joshi, adding it was high time the government carried out reforms in the Rent Control Act.

Das said redevelopment of Mhada colonies, spread over 2,000 hectares in the city, would create another 50 lakh affordable homes. "The government, as land owner, should give contracts to private builders for construction of affordable housing," he added.

The private real estate sector caters to only 15% of the city's population. "There is a crying need for affordable housing for both the middle class and the slum-dwellers, and the government must use its land for them and not allow it to be used for creating luxury apartments," Das said.