

A Run for Social Housing: Land Equity, Inclusive Planning and Urbanization of Cities

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Introduction

This paper brings to focus the question of 'right to housing', through a discussion on the ongoing struggles, by poor and marginalised sections, particularly the movements that have been waged in Mumbai, in which author and his organization Nivara Hakk, have actively participated. Framing the discussion within the approach of 'Right to the City', the author reflects on the following three aspects.

1. Land Equity: Ensuring reservation of land exclusively for affordable housing for the poor, lower middle class and other marginalized people.
2. Inclusive City Planning: Accepting existing land occupation patterns, including the informal settlements in the preparation of development plan of cities.
3. Housing and Urbanisation of Cities: Considering housing development for all beyond the free-market as a means for the achievement of urbanization and democratization of cities.

What concerns us most in cities today is land misutilisation, exclusionary planning and oppressive housing conditions, in which large numbers of people are forced to live. In the neo-liberalized world, market is the mantra and many nations pledge total allegiance to it, expecting it to deliver on almost all social development needs, including housing, health-care and education. This is why, since liberalisation, governments have been shirking their own responsibility and instead facilitating the private sector to undertake these responsibilities

But it is precisely this logic that has contributed to a lack of affordable housing and to the proliferation of slums and urban informal settlements in the city. The discussion of social housing is necessarily linked to and begins with the question of land- its availability, access, and affordability. In most cities, land is denied for the construction of affordable housing and social amenities for the poor and lower middle class. The high cost of land is also a deterrent. In the absence of formally developed affordable housing, vast numbers of poor and lower middle have no alternative but to live in slums. As a matter of fact, slums are the only places where people are able to find affordable housing. It is therefore not shortage of land but its manipulation and misutilization that has made affordable social housing unviable.

In cities of global south, vast sections of the population live in slums and informal settlements in highly oppressive and unacceptable conditions. It is required to therefore

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to rebuild these slums through participatory and democratic means for the achievement of dignified living conditions. In many cities, the poor sections have occupied land not only to have a roof over their head, but also to carry out economic activities. This occupation should be seen as an example of people claiming their right to land. It is in this context that movements against forced evictions and displacement should be seen as a significant political action for the achievement of the 'Right to the City' objective.

Planned redevelopment of slums cannot be pursued however outside of the larger city planning objectives, as the integration of slums and informal economic activity with the neighborhoods and the city is a necessary condition for sustainable urban development. Their inclusion and integration ought to be thus accepted as mandatory in defining land-use and planning of cities. Rather, these conditions should constitute the key principles of city planning and development programs for now and the future. Also, the current laws, which fail to deal with the needs and aspirations of the majority of marginalized sections should be amended, or new laws be introduced to this end.

As such, given the adverse land-person ratio in most cities, democratization of cities not only requires equity in land use, but also demands the consideration and achievement of collective ownership and sharing. And at a time when colonization of land and resources and various forms of social divide threaten our democratic fabric, the reconstruction of slums and informal settlements and their integration with the city would be an effective means for harnessing the much necessary collective solidarities.

Cities have grown in spite of the respective governments having miserably failed to deal with the diverse social needs and demands. As a matter of fact, it is due to the pressures put on governments by organizations and movements of the marginalized that the authorities have been forced to tolerate slums in many cities, and extend limited and conditional support. Therefore, the way forward in resolving this state of crises is to accept and include the various informal settlements and legalize land occupied by them. It is important to work towards their inclusion and upliftment, rather than demolish and displace.

Integral to the housing question is also the question of access to social amenities and infrastructure, including education and health care, open spaces, safe drinking water, sewage, sanitation and waste management, as also the state of the environment which impacts the quality of life in many direct and indirect ways. An understanding and assessment of the various issues relating to housing must therefore based on the needs, aspirations and demands of these struggling people and their relationship, or the lack of it, with the city.

I. LAND EQUITY

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Since liberalization, our cities are under siege by those who have colonized public assets, such as land, for personal and private profit. This scenario needs to be reversed and land must be reclaimed for public projects, including for social housing and infrastructure. In this regard, our development plan of cities must incorporate reservation and regularization of land occupied by slums and other informal settlements, and also redevelopment of existing settlements.

(1) Land for Affordable Housing:

One of the central questions related to housing question is how do we achieve equity in land use and interweave the disparate fragments of our fast growing cities into unified landscape?

In this regard, one needs to bring into view the commitments of the new Urban Agenda. It would have been a far-reaching achievement if all participating nations in Habitat III equivocally agreed to commit land in their cities exclusively for construction of affordable housing. It would have meant that governments would have had to undertake direct responsibility of building affordable housing and not rely on markets for their supply. Unfortunately this does not come through in the draft New Urban Agenda. However one of the outcomes of the conference was that the governments agreed to collectively review, intermittently assess, and agree on individual cities’ and nations’ action plans for successful implementation of the global objectives (Das Year)- my writing in ‘Nature of Cities’ blog.

Apart from the commitments of the New Urban Agenda, there is a need to outline more urgent and specific interventions for equitable distribution of land and an increased role of governments in building affordable housing and amenities for all. The challenge here will be to incorporate and reflect the multitude of local needs and demands into a set of common principles and action plans for the achievement of these objectives.

(2) Equity in land use:

As part of the liberalisation package, most countries have pushed the question of land to the back stage. It is no longer addressed directly but dodged through plans for various development projects. Take for instance the Urban Land (Ceiling and Regulation) Act (ULCRA), a progressive law that was introduced by the Government of India in 1976, which imposed a ceiling on vacant land in large cities and empowered the state to acquire land in excess of the ceiling. It was repealed after liberalization of India’s economy in 1990, and much due to the pressure of builders and developers along with others from the ruling class.

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Over the years, substantial public land has been gifted away by governments or captured by private developers. All this has seriously harmed public interest. In many instances, governments have negotiated deals with private landowners and developers for a small portion of the built-up area in their high-cost projects on affordable housing.

Lefebvre asserts that ‘physical land is not just a means of production but a part of the forces of production’. David Harvey too has observed that ‘physical space helps the dominant class to produce itself and maintain its hegemony over the other classes. Urban space, to a large extent, gets structured by the capitalist accumulation process and therefore reflects both its coherence and its contradictions’. Manuel Castell writes, ‘though control and direction of use of land to a large extent remain within broad based capitalist formations, there is evidence of social action on the part of the marginalized and the houseless urban poor, who collectively contend and compete for social goods (and services) including land’ (Sharma Year) – quote from R.N. Sharma in the book titled ‘Indian Cities in Transition’ edited by Shaw.

Land must remain with the state and should be considered as a vital public asset and must not be allowed colonisation by influential private interests or lobbies. Determination of land value, land-use and development must squarely rest upon public interest. But sadly this is not to be seen today. For Instance, Mumbai is in a critical state of underdevelopment as a result of high land price and speculative investment. Land value is being determined by private landowners under the market mechanism, making public projects unviable for implementation. There is thus a huge shortfall to the tune of one million houses in affordable housing and also social provisions such as health and education, among others.

(3) Social Housing:

Currently, the Habitat- III declaration specifies the need for the governments to allocate land for housing. This is too general, and rather weak as a proposition given the current situation of ownership of land. We know that land earmarked for housing has been taken over and exploited almost entirely for exclusive upper class housing, high-cost amenities and commercial development. Therefore, land has to be more specifically reserved for affordable housing and amenities. It is time that ‘Housing’ should be re-addressed or rephrased as ‘Social Housing’ in all the discussions and documents. The collective focus should shift to social housing alone given the gravity of housing condition in most cities.

Hopefully the New Urban Agenda follow-up conferences resolve that governments of all participating nations agree to commit adequate land for social housing and take upon themselves the responsibility for developing social housing and amenities.

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4) Speculative Urban Land:

In Indian cities, governments have devised ways by which the land occupied under slums has been open to grab by private developers for furthering their business interests. The governments hide this bluff on claims of providing free houses to the slum dwellers. However, experience of redeveloped slums shows how this promise is far from truth. Rather these schemes have imposed enormous financial burden on the people due to high repair, maintenance and management costs, which often compels them to sell or rent their houses and move to affordable alternatives. In short, the slum redevelopment schemes have resulted in the displacement, or threat of displacement, of the poor.

Experiences from some South American cities are different, but there too the poor are largely excluded from the various mainstream development works while being forced to continue with their lives in slum like conditions. The settlements built on land and hills in the distant peripheries of cities such as Lima, Bogota and Sao Paulo tell us similar story of exclusion and misery. Even though the occupied land and settlements of the poor have been recognized and regularized in many cities, there is however no plan for their integration and for provision of adequate and accessible amenities. For instance, health care facilities are severely lacking in these areas and people have to travel far to find a reliable doctor, and consequently are often compelled to seek relief from expensive, but ill equipped doctors or quacks in the local areas.

Through these multiple forms of exclusion, governments have pushed poor people to miseries of ghettoization, where, social tension, insecurity and violence are prevalent. Most people living in ghettos on the outskirts have to travel long distances to reach their work in the city centre. Therefore, merely recognizing and regularizing these settlements, without improving their living conditions or integrating them within the city, is not enough.

(5) Mapping existing land-use:

There is substantive evidence of how data is manufactured by governments to suit private interests of private investors and real estate agencies. As a matter of fact, most information given out in the public domain, is produced by few agencies, which are either directly set up by them or which support the principles of neo-liberalization. Such data invariably contradicts public interest. Given this context, a community led collective mapping process is necessary in order to challenge the information and data provided by governments and the private agencies.

Take the case of Mumbai, where it is common knowledge that builders and developers,

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in connivance with corrupt officials, tamper with land records, to seek land that has development potential. It has also been seen that the illegally reclaimed mangrove and wetland areas are being used for construction of various infrastructure and amenity projects or saltpan areas being pushed by governments for construction of affordable housing. In order to not only check such anti-people and environmentally dangerous acts, and to influence decisions that benefit the needs and aspirations of the majority of people, mapping of land becomes a necessary urban development strategy.

Community mapping is about building an effective public vigilance mechanism over public assets and development decisions, besides positively contributing to developing alternatives. The process of mapping is an effective means for mobilizing participation too. Promoting open data and organizing public dialogue are key tenets of democracy. Mapping is a significant political act as it opens new doors to socio-political understanding and valuation of the various resources—natural and man-made—while exposing and challenging the deep nexus between the various adverse forces that has over the years severed the various links and relationships. It also provides opportunity to general public to understand the history of land ownership, its value, its colonization and unavailability, thereby also influence its just utilization.

In 2011, Nivara Hakk and PK Das & Associates took on the exercise of mapping the slum lands of Mumbai using Google Earth images and data from the MCGM, SRA and various other Mumbai maps. This ‘Mumbai’s Slums Map’ was created with an objective of preparing a comprehensive Slum Redevelopment Master Plan and thereby help guide provisions for affordable housing, such as by reserving all slum occupied land for this purpose.

(6) Land, Ecology & Environment:

Mapping also helps in understanding the state of ecology and environment. This is indeed a critical concern as climate change is challenging the way we have built cities and put land and natural areas to threat. For instance, in Mumbai, reclamation of creeks, ponds, lakes, wetlands and mangroves for further construction has the city to a high risk of floods and other natural calamities. None other than the Mumbai Metropolitan Development Authority¹ (MMRDA) has reclaimed over 600 acres of Mithi River and flood plains in order to promote business and real estate interests. According to research studies done by institutes such as the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) and National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI), this has been a major cause of recurring floods in the neighborhoods around the river.

¹A state government agency for planning Mumbai’s development.

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Mapping not only helps record such excesses and the damages caused, but also helps us think of ways to restore and conserve the natural areas, and integrate them within city development plans. The commitment of governments towards preparation of development plans based on ecological and environmental priority is paramount, even if this requires demolishing and doing away with certain buildings.

Writing on environmental challenges and quality of life, Brian McGrath notes:

...this devastation is often seen as a symptom of the conflict between ‘environment’ and ‘development’. But this interpretation is thoroughly misleading. If development is about enhancing human freedoms and the quality of life – an important understanding for which we have argued – then the quality of the environment is bound to be part of what we want to preserve and promote. In fact, this broader view of development can help not only to integrate development and environmental concerns but also to achieve a better understanding of our environmental challenges, in terms of the quality and freedom of human lives”. He further states, “Cities and other urban ecosystems are jointly biological, social, built and geomorphic. This is the essence of urban ecology

Land in cities is judged by its construction potential. This mind set has to change. Adequate land has to be maintained for open spaces, city forests etc. in order to achieve sustainable growth, while responding to adverse climate change impact. Such land free of construction cannot be only in the periphery but has to be in proximity to the built-up areas. The value of land for construction ought to be considered on the basis of its closeness and relationship with open spaces. Open spaces include the various natural areas too. Interestingly, it is possible to achieve this integration even in densely built areas too. There are many examples of such interventions and urban insertions in cities across the world where without major demolition of existing buildings and displacing activities, it has been possible.

(7) Colouring land: Divided Land and territories

Land is usually colour coded as green, blue and brown. Green and blue represents coverage with trees and water, brown indicates barren land. In India, such barren land is considered to be wasteland and managed by the Wasteland Board, a government authority. But, in cities today, we witness a new colour of land, which is grey, signifying land laden with concrete. The extent and density of the grey depends on the volume of concrete consumed, and it is used by governments as a basis of judging the scale of development achieved. But, these physical divisions are not the only ones we see in our urban scenarios. As cities are expanding, we find them increasingly divided on lines of

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caste, race, religion, class, gender and sexuality. A conspicuous separation is that between gated communities of the privileged and ghettoized territories of marginalized people.

Reflecting on this fragmentation nature of our contemporary cities, Annapurna Shaw writes:

In the gated communities, there is a lack of tolerance for plurality and its accompanying untidiness that marks the rest of the Indian city. They represent a new and exclusive environment that has been purposely created to be orderly, clean and with sharp boundaries. They reflect the increasingly disengaged nature of the rich and upper classes in urban India who want to be left alone to enjoy their lives and not be disturbed by the heterogeneous clamor of the city. The formal private sector are increasingly high-rise to support the high cost of land, allow for open green spaces, and guarantee a sky-view of the city and the feeling of being far away and above the din and dirt.

(8) Land Value:

Within the market economy, value and use of land is decided upon its development potential. That is why governments are regularly revisiting and revising the various development control regulations, particularly increasing permissible FAR in order to boost the development potential of land. Real estate builders and developers also influence such revisions. Even when high FAR has been detrimental to urban development interest, governments have raised the FAR of select areas and projects. Value of land is regularly manipulated upwards in the interest of monopoly control of land and resources by private agencies.

Given this context, the question is, how can we ensure affordable and low cost housing and amenity projects? This is possible if governments implement a varying land price policy, where in land designated for various social development works has a considerably low price compared to land available for exclusive and high-cost projects. Such land policies are in place in countries like Columbia and Netherlands, which should be discussed and adapted by all cities.

National and city governments all over the world would have to consider measures that discourage the evaluation of land price by free market forces and that fix prices for social projects with an objective of making projects affordable to the poor. In fact, nations must formulate and adopt policies that would enable abolition of private ownership of land.

II. INCLUSIVE PLANNING

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The second most important aspect of ensuring housing for all is the acceptance of existing land occupation patterns, particularly that of the informal settlements. City development plans must take into account the land occupied under slums and other informal settlements and consider that as the basis for the preparation of the plan. Such an approach should in fact be a key principle of city planning.

(1) Planning:

Planning, as we know is a tool for the achievement of development objectives. But when development objectives are skewed in favor of a few who control land and resources, it works against public interest. Shivramakrishnan (Year) states, “City master plans generally follow an exclusionary model that reserve land for housing of high and middle-income groups, commercial, institutional, recreational and other uses, with no earmarking for low-income groups. These plans are not in consonance with the income distribution structure of cities and towns. The norms of planning including density and development also favour the comparatively better off sections. These deficiencies are further compounded by state agencies, such as development authorities, resorting to auction of the limited land available with them in cities and setting exorbitant benchmarks for the market price of land”- K.C.Sivaramakrishnan.

It is not just the poor but also large sections of the middle class who are excluded from access to land & housing available in the open market. In cities like Mumbai, more than 80% of the city’s population constituting over none million people cannot afford to buy or rent houses being built and marketed by private developers. As a matter of fact, the mighty real estate agencies- builders and developers, cater to just about 15% of the city’s population. The numbers of those excluded include 50% living in slums occupying just 15% of the total developable land, 5% living on footpaths and marginal spaces, 25% living as tenements that are very old and dilapidated. Then there are the 5-10% (figure not established through survey) who live in housing provided by their employees. Mumbai is also worst among the big metros in respect of the average living space occupied by families. Here, 65% of all households are living in spaces with one or less than one dwelling room. Such figures may vary in other cities, but the point is that in most cities vast majority of city population have no access to housing sold in the open market, due to ridiculously high prices.

When democratically elected governments support those who blatantly carry out anti-people activities, then there is little opportunity for seeking justice for the marginalized people. This trend in decision-making is reflected in the planning of cities too, particularly in decisions relating to land-use and development. It is therefore not surprising that production and availability of social housing is not a priority and in many Indian cities, urban planning and design is neglected. Instead, those policies and regulations that

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facilitate 'development' are undertaken. The impact of such a decision making process on the built form and environment of the city has therefore been devastating.

David Harvey states, "any successful strategy must appreciate that spatial form and social process are different ways of thinking about the same thing. We must therefore harmonize our thinking about them". Planning & design are effective democratic tools of social change and therefore must be put to public domain and popularized in order to free it from the shackles of the manifold control and exclusivity.

(2) Planners & Architects:

Today, planners and architects are operating within a web of contradictions. They are mostly considered mere service providers by builders. In turn most of them express very little or no concern for larger socio-environmental issues or participate individually or collectively in the preparation of plans and policies for the city. When they do participate, they represent or confirm to the preferences of the ruling class and the market forces. In many instances they act as direct agents of private investors and developers.

Justin Mcguirk writes in his book Radical Cities: Across Latin America in Search of A New Architecture, 'Lefebvre was right to say that 'the architect is no more a miracle-worker than the sociologist. Neither can create social relations.' They can, however, create the channels for those social relations to occur naturally. They can create lines of communication, transport links and reasons for middle-class citizens to overcome their fears and go to the slums. Overcoming prejudice and stigmatisation is essential to making cities more cohesive. Until these methods become more mainstream, we can refer to the architects who practice them as 'activists'. Unlike their forebears, these architects are not the agents of a welfare state, and they can no longer count on wholesale political support. The world is a more complicated pace: they have to negotiate cities governed increasingly by private interests. In the early twenty-first century it is possible to be political and yet to believe in the market as a tool. They have to play off the private against the public to get the most out of both. They have to insinuate themselves into politicians' plans. They have to be radical while pretending not to be (there is no greater turn-off to a politician than the idea that you want to try something radical, something risky). They would never call themselves 'activist architects'.

(3) Fragmented Participation:

Planning is important, but the real challenge is participatory planning. Governments, administrators, land owning agencies and builders hate the idea of peoples' participation. They see participation as a major challenge to their freedom of decision-making. Therefore, participation is deliberately limited to select individuals and groups who they

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are comfortable, and who merely endorse the decisions already made. It is for this reason that governments have reduced public participation and opinion into tokenism or a mere formality.

It is government administrators who assume full authority in the planning of cities, serving a link between politicians, builders and developers. In India, we find enough evidence of politicians being builders themselves or closely associated with builders and developers. It is they who decide about planning and design of cities. The undermining of town planning standards and the intent of public interest, is seen in the adverse condition of our cities. It is the recognition and inclusion of the multitude of community organisations and their movements that will enable the achievement of wider participation in decisions relating to all matters that affect them and the city.

(4) From Rights to Concessions:

The shift from rights to concessions is yet another oppressive trend that has come to prevail, particularly in our liberalized world. Public freedom and rights over a wide array of issues have been turned into matters of negotiation and seeking concessions, leading to reduction in public space and participation. Discussions relating to land and development are led by private agencies and NGO's end up bargaining for concessions in money and goods rather than for fulfillment of basic rights. It is only after protests that governments begin to grant some benefits to the public, but that too without altering the very foundations upon which exclusive, private empires are built.

In India, before the liberalization of economy in 1991, peoples' movements in Mumbai, including struggles for housing, were targeted at the government. Post 1991 saw a significant curtailment of space for people to meet and negotiate their demands with their elected government. Instead, they are now forced to deal with private agencies - developers, builders, financiers, who have been mandated by the government to carry out public interest projects. Such a process is steadfastly undermining the larger objective of democratization of cities and therefore must be altered to a more vibrant and participatory democracy.

(5) Stitching the Fragments:

(quotes from my writings in 'Nature of Cities' blog): 'Urban planning and open data has the power if undertaken through democratic movements, to stitch together the disparate city fragments and enable the sharing of resources. It is in this context that urban planning achieves significance as an instrument for building resistances to this current phenomenon of fragmentation of cities and for bringing about much needed socio-

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environmental change towards unification & equity'. An alternate urban planning and open data right is critical for challenging the ongoing anti-poor trend of urbanization and for the achievement of democratic cities instead.

The emergence of gated communities is another trend that is furthering the fragmentation of cities into exclusive privatized blocks, while reducing the left over spaces as mere transportation corridors: roads, highways and flyovers that support our increased dependency on motorized transport. As cities expand, public spaces are rapidly shrinking. It needs to be asked: where are the streets where people meet, exchange politics and build social and community networks?

Erosion of public space in both its physical and democratic dimensions is leading to people being excluded from mainstream developments. It imposes enormous burden on people, particularly the poor and the marginalized, while leading to inequality and environmental injustice. These 'development' processes also further alienation and social tensions. Sustainable urban ecology is thus severely fractured.

Our challenge is not only to check the fragmentation of our cities in all its violent dimensions but also build a robust urban ecology rooted in the democratic principles of social and environmental justice. Urban design is an incredible tool for the achievement of this objective. Plans ought to address these issues, and aim to achieve the integration of the vast extent of natural assets with the daily social and cultural life of people.

(6) Popularization of Planning & Design:

Quoting my writings in 'Nature of Cities',

“City Planning and Design as Effective Democratic Tools of social change. Mainstream planning and design ideas that predominantly reflect the political ideology and interest of the ruling class and their agents are often in conflict with larger development interests. This has been realised through many examples the world over, including in the historical cases of Haussmann’s plans for Paris and Moses’ plans for New York and the protests that followed in both cities. Plans for cities could be utilised for exactly the opposite objective: to achieve social integration by engaging communities as agents of change, as has been championed by Jane Jacob and others”.

In the context of rapid urbanisation, people’s movements in and across cities claiming 'Urban Planning and Design Rights' have therefore come to be essential. It is heartening that people in different parts of the world are intervening in decisions that affect their lives and questioning the plans and projects that are being forced on them. Communities in different neighborhoods and cities are demanding public discussion on matters relating

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to planning and design issues.

Let's review an example from Mumbai. Recently the Municipal Corporation and the state government put forward the new Draft Development Plan 2012- 2032. The plan was clearly anti-people and detrimental to the ecology and environmental interests. It avoided the question of slums redevelopment and their integration with the city, and proposed plans that would further cut down the meager open spaces.²

Citizens groups, NGO's, workers, slum-dwellers and even ordinary middle class people organized public meetings in protest. Concerted effort to build public opinion forced the government to recall the plan and start the process all over again. The consultants appointed earlier for the preparation of the plan were terminated. Thereafter, the municipal corporation has gone through public hearings, evaluating over 50,000 suggestions and objections filed by individuals and organizations. Hopefully a more acceptable plan will emerge reflecting the development needs and demands of all the people.

(7) Planning & Design:

We have to place urban planning and design at the center stage of decision-making process and undertake comprehensive, integrated and inclusive planning that takes into account all existing activity and land occupation pattern. If such an approach is accepted, then the conflicts that often lead to critical roadblocks can be overcome. As displacements would be reduced to the minimum, public opinion in support will provide a positive step forward in bringing about significant socio-environmental change and towards the achievement of higher standards of urban conditions.

Urban Design too has to be evolved and put to test. However, in spite of the many contradictions and discrimination rooted in social, cultural, political, religious, caste and gender differences, it is necessary to spearhead movements and undertake specific plans and projects that have the potential of being effective means for the achievement of equality and justice.

Urban Planning and Design should be considered a 'right' and brought to public dialogue. This democratization would be a significant step towards the achievement of just and equal cities. Exercising this right would be an effective means for bringing about much needed socio-environmental change. Claiming 'urban planning and design rights' has to be understood as part of larger movement for claiming "right to the city", as much as

² Mumbai has a miserable ratio of less than 1.5 m² per person open space. In comparison, London has 31.68, New York, 26.4, Tokyo, 3.96.

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other democratic rights movements. In other words, to claim urban planning and design rights is to assert peoples’ power over the ways in which our cities are created, with a determination to build socially and environmentally just and democratic cities.

(8) Architecture and Democratic Practices:

There is also need to relate planning and architecture with larger democratic movements and to use it as an instrument to mobilize communities for political action to bring about development justice. The engagement of an architect as an activist enriches the architects role and position in society to a much greater degree, wherein s/he begins to co-relate design with larger and more important determining factors of social and political importance.

Designs for public projects play an important role in the development process. They become an instrument for mobilizing and leading the movement. Initially designs are used to attract attention and to bring together interested people, particularly the neighborhood citizens. A discussion on the design instigates participation. People begin to realize the different dimensions of the project and chip-in their views. They are also able to comprehend the physicality of the project and the important change that it would bring to their environment and life in the neighborhood. Regular discussions of the design and aspects of the implementation then becomes engaging whereby more and more people get attracted to the project. The implementation of city plans and programs with people’s participation is a significant instrument for mobilizing larger political struggles for equality and justice. It is public action alone that can deeply influence decisions governments take.

(9) Expanding Public spaces:

There is a need to prepare development plans of cities which emphasise public spaces expansion. Today, deprivation of open spaces, destruction of the environment and the abuse of our natural resources including water bodies have rendered our cities into a regrettable state. This is further exacerbated by high cost of urban transportation, lack of housing for a majority of the people, and inadequate and costly amenities.

“The objectives for any city should be to expand its open spaces by identifying its natural assets, preserving them and designing them to turn into public spaces for recreation. The aim should be to expand and network public open spaces, conserve natural assets & protect eco-sensitive borders, prepare comprehensive waterfronts/natural assets ecological plans, establish walking and cycling tracks to induce health enhancing behavior while promoting energy efficient transport and promote social, cultural and recreational opportunities”- ‘Open Mumbai’, P.K.Das.

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A good city should have a good community life. Today urbanized centers world over have a tendency to create individual spaces and gated communities, which result in aloofness, loneliness and depressed lifestyles. Individualism and self-gratification as promoted by the markets takes over. A sense of community fades and individualism takes over. This needs to be addressed and can be done by building more public spaces. According to urbanologist Jan Gehl “when the city whole heartedly invites to walk, stand and sit in the city’s common space a new urban pattern emerges: more people walk and stay in the city. We need to design cities as meeting places — for small events and larger perspectives. City designers need to set the stage for necessary activities like walking, optional activities like enjoying a view and social activities like tempting public interaction. Public institutions tempt public interaction and greatly enhance and consolidate social, cultural and community aspirations. Historically public institutions like libraries, cultural centers, theatre, planned squares and plazas, etc. have led to significant movements, demonstrations and alternate thinking. For now and for the future it is necessary to establish public institutions to contribute and enrich the life of all the people in the city and facilitate growth of public engagement and knowledge for human development. By building public spaces we weave psychological and intellectual growth into a comprehensive physical plan while bringing substance to the notion of public realm”.

(10) Neighborhood Based City Planning:

Through a neighborhood based development approach it would be possible to decentralize and localize projects and their designs, breaking away from megamonolithic planning and design ideas with enormous investments that impose unbearable burdens on the lives of most people. Such planning also facilitate closer interaction between people and creates a more collaborative approach to city and place making. The various ‘reclaiming public spaces movements’ in Mumbai neighbourhoods such as Bandra and Juhu have allowed the immediate reclamation, redesign and re-programming of public space. These interventions would never have been anticipated by a master plan for the city -‘Juhu Vision Plan, P.K.Das.

Integrating slums and other informal settlements with various neighborhoods and the city is a necessary condition for the achievement of a sustainable city. The informal and illegal settlements, indeed people, cannot be pushed to the peripheries, thus furthering their exclusion. In cities such as Mumbai, the informal settlements, which jostle with the formal developments across neighborhoods. Following protracted struggles by the slum-dwellers, the government has now been forced to accept this demand of according recognition to slum land and the slum-dwellers, though that is fraught with many contradictions.

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In cities of the Global South, when the poor have been evicted to the periphery, any renewed attempts must stop forthwith, a host of issues have to be addressed for their integration, including services, infrastructure, transport and employment generation, among others. But, this does not mean that those city governments should give up the possibility of assigning land and housing for the poor in the various neighborhoods of their city. City planning and design must respond to this significant unification objective, rather should be rooted in it. This is possible to achieve to a great extent in every city however built or occupied it may be.

It is urban planning and design that provides incredible power for the achievement of the objective of unification of people, places and nature. It is argued that participation in urban planning and design need to be considered a right, and the popularization and democratization of the same should be seen as an important step. We can plan cities by taking into account existing land occupation patterns, particularly slums and informal sectors, rather than causing displacements due to the imposition of land use plans that are based on skewed planning standards and vested private and political interests. Also, natural areas and assets must form an integral aspect of city planning and design programs in which people are considered as custodians.

III. HOUSING & URBANISATION OF CITIES

(1) Housing:

Often in matters relating to housing and urban development, materialistic ideas and financial interests take privilege. Architects and planners are also overtly obsessed with the physical state of housing, with little concern for people’s needs, aspirations and demands. Also, housing is dealt, in most instances, independently of the larger process of urbanization.

Under the free-market economy, housing is considered a product, a tradable value that can generate profit. People are expected to adjust to the physical spaces produced by the developers that often lack urban design and planning standards. This is particularly so in housing for the poor. Housing development is to be considered first as a socio-political process and thereafter realized in as forms of space and structure. An integrated planning and development of social housing would contribute significantly to building higher standards of urban conditions. As a matter of fact, the process of social housing is an effective democratic means for the social, cultural and political change towards the achievement of urbanization and democratization of cities.

People’s active participation is central to the successful achievement of social housing. Struggle for housing is essentially a democratic rights struggle. Movements and struggles

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for housing are an essential democratic means for the achievement of equal and just cities.

(2) Urbanization of Cities:

It is necessary to understand that urbanization and city making are not synonymous as it is generally made out to be. Even though city making is an incredible means for the achievement of urbanization, the two are independent of each other.

Cities have been growing without achieving or providing all its people with necessary urban conditions to live and work with respect and dignity. The exclusion of more and more people from the benefits of development, particularly their access to formal and dignified housing is squarely a failure of the current pattern of urbanization which is steadfastly undermining the very idea of cities. Cities, expanding rapidly in size and population are not a sign of desirable and sustainable urbanization. Achievement of higher human development standards, along with equity and justice for all, would be true indicators of successful urbanization and city making effort. Tragically, cities are being rapidly divided into disparate fragments of exclusive communities and marginalized populations. It is in this context that the housing question has to be understood and evaluated. Our failure to ensure these basic human rights to vast majority of city population exposes our failure while challenging our collective capacity and capabilities, thereby undermining the very essence of urbanization.

(3) Housing & Social Development:

Justin McGuirk writes in Radical Cities: ‘Across Latin America in Search of a New Architecture, McGuirk (Year) states, “A house is indeed a static object, but within a larger layout with many other houses and a host of amenities and infrastructure. It is the relation between a house and its setting that must necessarily be dynamic with variations and open to a process of change as newer amenities and community needs are required over time. For it is the collective and shared spaces that provides the foundation to building communities and networks. In an event, that most cities are subject to, that certain minimum density has to be achieved in order to justify land prices and land-use efficiency. Therefore multistoried buildings with certain minimum standardization are inevitable’. In such blocks, while growth of each house or changes as may be desired by the occupant(s), may not be practical or viable in structural terms”.

Socialist housing in Eisen Hutten Stadt, East Germany:

There is a fine example of a social housing project in the town of Eisen Hutten Stadt in East Germany. This town was planned and built in early fifties, after the end of the World

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War II, to provide housing to the homeless. A steel plant was also built in proximity during the same time to provide jobs.

I visited the city in December 2017 and met a couple Mr. Hans Joachini Friebel and Mrs. Ane Katrina Friebel, aged 75 and 72 in their house. I know them as the grand-parents of my son-in-law. I had a long discussion with them on a host of issues, including housing. They related to me their journey during the war when they were driven out by the Russians from an area in East Germany that was merged with Poland. At the time, they were not married or known to each other. They have been living in this beautiful, a one and a half bedroom apartment since the mid 50s. When I met them, it was Christmas time and they had decorated the house. We had some wonderful lunch at home followed by a variety of freshly baked cakes. I was moved by their warmth and hospitality.

The couple is now happily retired. He was a butcher and she worked in a community center. Together they get a pension from the government to the tune of 3000 Euros a month. They pay a rent of 400 Euros per month to the government, which is less than 15% of their income. Initially they had to pay 4000 euros as their contribution, which was taken care of by their employees who recovered the amount over a long period from their salary.

Criticism of the socialist mass housing that I have read about is rooted in the political disagreement with socialism and socialist ideology, less on reason and objectivity of the housing projects themselves. Most such criticism deliberately ignores the time and context in which the implementation of such projects was undertaken, and also its relevance. This is not to say that all other aspects of housing are not important, such as good or bad planning and design. Our aims and objectives of building homogeneous and harmonious spaces in order to harness community networks and strength are indeed important. Matters relating to planning are not limited to the nature and quality of structures alone and their design or the perceived aesthetics that greatly vary, but about the forms of spaces and structures that it generates. Speed of production, numbers of houses achieved and the economy of development, are indeed necessary conditions for consideration too. Eisen Hutten Stadt is a good example of social housing where I found all of these concerns well addressed.

One of the common criticisms of the socialist mass housing has been about the repeated monotonous building blocks. But, today under free-market economy, we find in Mumbai, as in other Indian cities, exactly the same- repetative building blocks being built all over the city under the slums redevelopment schemes and other social housing projects by the state, including in the reconstruction of old dilapidated buildings. Worse is that very little space is being provided between the repeated blocks of buildings, without any concern for the provision of open spaces and amenities and a host of other community interests..

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Various buildings in Eisen Hutten Stadt viewed independent of its neighbourhood seem monotonous, but such isolated viewing is not the way of judging the values of housing. The abundant open spaces and amenities in the neighbourhood, gives the place a distinct feel. It is these collective and shared spaces that sustain the Eisen Hutten Stadt community.

My friends took us out for a walk in the neighborhood, walking alongside a river, then into the various housing clusters, schools, old peoples' homes, community centers, playgrounds etc. I was moved to see how well this development under a socialist regime understood so well the needs of a community and successfully provided adequate space for it without compromise. As we walked along, several other people also leisurely walking waved out to the couple and they greeted each other. This was Christmas time when most people were enjoying their holidays.

As an architect, what was most surprising and heartening for me to see was the restoration and redevelopment of some of the buildings which were then under way, with some of it completed. These buildings had a contemporary look and a refreshing change from what was built over 60-65 years back. In this process of restoration, the authorities have provided additional space to each house, including new balconies. There is no trace of the old monotonous look. This is an interesting example where the issue of monotony is overcome during renovation and expansion of the buildings that had become necessary over time, for structural reasons and life style changes.

In spite of all the good things of community life and spaces and the pride and dignity of living here, what remains in question for me is the fact that there is no scope provided by the authorities for participation of the community in decisions that affect their lives. It is the government constituted authority that looks after the maintenance and governance of this township, including carrying out the changes that are required by way of renovation and densification by the addition of new buildings and facilities. It is the collaboration of government agencies with communities that must form the sole basis of governance. This is important indeed in the interest of housing and its future. But, this aspect of housing process is also not given any consideration in most democratic nor market oriented economies.

(4) Housing Design:

Questions relating to Floor Area Ratio (FAR) and density are important issues to deal with in affordable housing plans, particularly the context of massive housing shortfall in cities. Today, city governments are on the path of granting higher and higher FAR in order to boost development and with a hope that it will generate more housing stock. Mainstream

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planners and architects too believe and progate this idea that what is needed is increased supply for which higher FAR is the solution. The World Bank also promulgates this idea while granting financial assistance. Perhaps it is a part of their funding policy, it seems.

20-25 floors high-rise buildings for rehabilitation of slum dwellers as being pushed in the case of Mumbai is certainly undesirable and unsustainable for the poor and the city- due to lack of supporting infrastructure and support in case of fire and other emergencies.

In the case of Mumbai, in spite of manifold increase of FAR, the shortage in housing has only grown. This is certainly not because of high level of migration into the city or rapid increase in its population, for in the past ten years or so, there has been a decline in the rate of migration. Certain wards or localities have also registered drop in population. It is because while producing more built-up space, higher FAR does not necessarily address the problem of shortage of affordable housing and amenities. More construction does not fulfill the shortfall. Needless to say that insufficient and sub-standard services and infrastructure cannot support higher FAR and higher volumes of construction in many cities in the global south, including Mumbai.

(5) Self-Help Housing:

Here is a discussion on the case of ‘Sanjay Gandhi Nagar’ a slum that occupied land in Nariman Point, a high profile business district of Mumbai. It amply brings out the contradictions of self-help housing in terms of social, aspirational and political interests in the current context of high density and high land values in cities. The following extract is from a publication by the organization Nivara Hakk.

‘Sanjay Gandhi Nagar, located at Nariman Point, India’s premier business and residential district was one of the first examples of large scale resistance to slum demolitions in Mumbai in 1986, and in many ways, it catalysed the formation and spread of Nivara Hakk. It also represents the brutal irony of Mumbai’s housing crisis – the rich and the well-heeled staying in skyscrapers cheek-by-jowl with slums that house their maids, cooks and drivers; and yet it is the same bureaucrats and opinion makers who plan and justify the eviction of the slum dwellers without batting an eyelid’.

‘In March 13, 1986, 300 huts were demolished at Sanjay Gandhi Nagar slum at Nariman Point by the BMC without any warning. Locals had received demolition notices earlier in November and January and they had approached the then Maharashtra housing minister Dr. V. Subramanian seeking help to create a co-operative society for the slum community, and to construct buildings on the same plot or allocate an alternative site. Following this meeting, a survey was undertaken by the Rehvasi Sanghatna, but the demolition came as a surprise to the slum-dwellers. No alternate accommodation was provided. According to

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the Collector, that land was earmarked for Post & Telegraph department, Fire Brigade department and a new MLA hostel, and the demolition was to make way for these facilities’.

‘Upper class pressure for demolition was obvious from the buildings that surrounded the slum. One of them was the government building ‘Sarang’ that was occupied by top bureaucrats, some ministers and judges; and the housing minister V. Subramanian himself. Interestingly, most of the maids and cooks in these buildings were women from Sanjay Gandhi Nagar. The State government promised alternative plots to those slum dwellers whose names appeared in the census conducted between 1976 and 1980 or whose names were in electoral rolls before 1980, but there were hardly any from Sanjay Gandhi Nagar who fell in this ‘rehab’ bracket’.

‘Sanjay Gandhi Nagar was a scene of despair on the fateful day of the demolition in March 1986 as the poor residents sought to salvage their belongings and protect their young ones from getting hurt. Demolition squads, protected by truckloads of police, carried away tin scaffolding and other structural materials that had ironically been given to them by the government only a few months earlier in November 1985, following a devastating fire’. ‘The families then took refuge on the footpaths across the road, and received support from Nivara Hakk. Shabana Azmi and Anand Patwardhan along with local residents launched a protest fast. The struggle went on over several months and saw marches and, gheraos of the Collector and Housing minister V Subramanian, and was widely reported by the media. Ultimately, the government yielded and the Rehvasi Sanghatna and Nivara Hakk succeeded in acquiring a 3.0 acre plot in Dindoshi, near Goregaon. The land, deeply quarried to 40 ft. depth, was a private deal negotiated by then housing secretary D. K. Afzalpurkar with the F.E. Dinshaw Trust, and then handed over to the Sanjay Gandhi Rehvasi Sanghatna in 1991. At the same time, another 0.5 acre was handed to Nivara Hakk Welfare Centre for development of facilities and a centre of advocacy for slum-dwellers and housing rights’.

‘However, problems for the slum dwellers did not stop after the March 1986 demolitions. In the meantime, Nivara Hakk had approached the state government to support development work in various slums. Sanjay Gandhi Nagar, rehabilitated in Dindoshi, Goregaon needed levelling and land filling, sewage system for 300 hutments, construction of toilets at various points, water distribution system, access road and internal pathways and boundary fencing. Till 1993, the BMC did not carry out any land filling work as promised’.

‘The answer came in the form of self-help housing with Nivara Hakk helping with layout and common area development. People here as in most other slums and squatter settlements, built their own houses and developed the common areas. The plot sizes

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given to each of the families were the same. However, the materials used in the construction of houses and the size of the house depended upon its affordability for each family. People's priority of spending for housing was very low with limited income, as medical care, children's education, clothing and food were more important. Therefore, houses were built gradually as and when money was available. Renovating and upgrading their homes was a long term housing plan. As a result, houses were built independently and grew differently, the expressions reflecting each family's needs and life-styles and their economic condition and also their attitudes and interaction'.

'Planning for the rehabilitation of a 'slum' had to necessarily incorporate the above realities while generating harmony and an identity. Nivara, guided by architect PK Das, prepared a layout plan outlining the position of common toilets, water taps, community center, society office, accesses and open spaces. The plan proposed plots larger than the plinth area of every house in order to create a compulsory, open-to sky space, a place to cook, sit out, wash clothes and sleep. Common, open spaces were along the accesses forming chowks for get-togethers and spaces for the children to play. Since every house was to be built and extended according to the individual's means, subsequent repairs and maintenance too became simple without dependence on professional help, no linked to the status or consent of neighbors. An open space in the north, along the hill, acted as a buffer and protected the houses from possible landslides. A fairly large part was to be used for common facilities such as toilets and water taps. Also, extensive tree plantation was planned. A large, common space required for get-togethers, festivals and children to play was provided along with the welfare centre'.

'But for most residents of the new colony at Dindoshi, their aspiration lay in living in multi-storey buildings. The opportunity came when around 2005, a local builder offered a rehabilitation package to the residents. Sanjay Gandhi Rehvasi Sanghatna, after detailed negotiations, entered into an agreement for the development of their 3-acre property. The broad outline of the agreement was: JP Infra would construct 300 sq. ft. homes in 20-storey buildings in situ in one part of the property; each resident would receive Rs.6 lakh as ex gratia payment; and rent of premise would be reimbursed during the period of this construction'.

'After entering into this agreement, the project is being implemented currently as a Slum Rehabilitation Authority (SRA) project with the 300 residents to be accommodated in two 20-storey buildings in around one-third of the plot, while the remaining 2 acres or so will be used by the builder to develop semi-luxury 2 and 3 BHK apartments for free sale in the housing market to cross subsidise the one-room tenements and to make a margin of profit for itself.

'From Nivara Hakk's point of view, the residents, who had fought a heroic battle for

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homes and shelter and won, thereafter squandered a great opportunity – the opportunity to develop for themselves a progressive and modern community and neighbourhood with sustainable density, without multi-storey buildings that will over the years demand a heavy price for maintenance. Effectively, nearly three acres of land, won with the blood and sweat of slum-dwellers has passed into the hands of a for-profit middle and upper class housing project’.

(6) Understanding Slums:

Slums are not homogeneous but are a microcosm of the society at large with all the social differences and conflicts. There are critical differences between individuals and groups of people living in slums, not only in terms of their incomes but also in their needs and aspirations. Residing in a slum is not a preferred choice of the poor, as some would have us believe. It is the forced ghettoization of the poor and the marginalized people. Rule of law seldom works in these pockets of parallel power where a nexus of slumlords, government officials and police, and political representatives control and manage land and the way houses and services are built and distributed.

Singh, Dewan and Das (Year) in Nivara Hakk publication write, “Living conditions in most slums are deplorable and oppressive. Low-grade, and in-sufficient services and amenities coupled with overflowing drains and garbage pileup has led to unhygienic living conditions, thereby adversely affecting the health and laboring capacity of slum dwellers. Repairing and retrofitting the various adhoc civic services and collapsing infrastructure, including the houses people have built, will not work, a planned redevelopment is the need of the hour”.

A historic bluff perpetrated has been the provision of ‘free housing’ through slums redevelopment. These schemes have been used by private builders and developers to grab slum land and force poor families to often part with the only asset they have – their meager hovels. These schemes have also polarised slum communities between warring builders and displaced those whose records are in the grey zone. The history of this government ‘rehab scheme’ has proven that they have hardly helped to bolster the right to housing in the city; if anything, they have undermined the movement for affordable housing.

Justin McGuirk writes in his book- ‘Radical Cities’, According to McGuirk (Year), “accepting the informal city, as an unavoidable feature of the urban condition, and not as a city-in waiting, is the key lesson that this generation of Latin American architects can offer the world. The challenge they are now addressing is not just how to rehabilitate the slums, by inserting necessary services and improving quality of life, but how to integrate them into the city as a whole, creating the connections and flows, the points of communication

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and inclusion that will dissolve the lines of exclusion and collision. Urbanism in the informal city has to be smarter than in the past; it needs to be flexible, so that it can handle unplanned change”.

Central to state government policy has to be the allocation of adequate land for affordable housing and amenities. It is fundamental to addressing the housing question. Trying to work out solutions through negotiation with private builders and developers is only scratching the surface.

Understanding slums rehabilitation and Sangharsh Nagar, Mumbai:

An example of a successful people’s struggle for housing rights that Nivara Hakk waged in Mumbai’s complex social laboratory was the rehabilitation of 25,000 families who lived in the slums bordering the Sanjay Gandhi National Park. After over two decades of struggle and lobbying, the rehabilitation township – Sangharsh Nagar – is today perhaps the largest urban rehab project in Asia, and among one of the most successful experiments, centering as it does on the inclusionary rights of the city’s citizens.

On May 1, 2007, the then Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Vilasrao Deshmukh, handed over the keys of 4,142 homes to families from the slum communities residing near the Sanjay Gandhi National Park. Today, the first phase of the project is complete and nearly 12,000 families live in small apartments in seven-storey buildings, leaving behind their miserable hovels on the unfriendly slopes of the forested national park.

It was a long and difficult struggle that began in 1992, overcoming on the way huge obstacles and challenges. Soon after suffering the communal strife in 1992-93, these slum communities in the national park stretching from Goregaon to Dahisar in the Western suburbs and Bhandup to Thane on the Central side, faced waves of demolitions and eviction by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) and state government. However, they survived on the strength of street struggles and a series of court orders that gave temporary relief.

In 1998, the Bombay High Court ordered that they be rehabilitated outside the Park within 18 months but the land allocated by the government was in Kalyan and Shirdon talukas, more than 60 kms outside the city. The slum communities expectedly resisted shifting to these far-out sites as it would have spelt economic ruin for them.

People from all walks of life joined hands to demand a viable solution. Former Prime Minister V.P. Singh joined the stage with Nivara Hakk’s Shabana Azmi in 2000 to lead street protests. A panel of retired High Court judges that included Justices Rajinder

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Sachar, Hosbet Suresh and S.M. Daud recorded the ground reality of brutal evictions and arrests by the police and forest officials.

As a way out of the imbroglio, in December 1999, the Maharashtra government proposed a rehab project under the Slum Redevelopment Authority (SRA) on a 34.41 hectare (85 acre) swathe of land at Chandivali, owned by the developers Sumer Corporation. Nivara Hakk, after negotiations on the various provisions. A plan and designs of buildings was prepared by architect P.K.Das through a participatory programme, which in two phases would house 25,000 families. The project was finally approved by SRA in 2000 and construction was launched soon after.

The first phase houses 12,000 units, each of 225 sq.ft. carpet area spread over 18.22 ha (45 acres), divided into 15 clusters, with 16 buildings in each cluster. In terms of quality, the design with cross-ventilation and the feel of an apartment have made the houses superior to the standard slum rehab building which is usually constructed with a central corridor with train compartment type rooms on either side. Phase II of the project is yet to come up, will house another 13,000 families.

With nearly 25,000 families expected to finally inhabit the complex, the rehab scheme is equivalent to a 'C' Class town. Planned as an all-inclusive township, 'Sangharsh Nagar' on the drawing board has two playgrounds and 60 community open spaces. Included in the plans are two hospitals, a common market area, two large community halls as well as a string of primary health centres. A central courtyard has been provided to each cluster of buildings where vehicles have been banned.

Significantly, the rulebook for slum rehab projects does not envisage township planning and there are no provisions for common civic and recreational needs like the requirement of playgrounds, markets and hospitals. The challenge therefore before Nivara Hakk was to ensure that these elements be included in the project to make the rehabilitation process comprehensive. The task also included working closely with the Municipal Corporation to ensure garbage disposal, markets, proper access roads and public transportation.

The Chandivali project is significant for Mumbai not only for the large number of housing units and its sheer size, but also for the impact it has made on the struggle for housing rights, including claims for right to land and the formulation of various housing policies relating to slum rehabilitation and redevelopment, by the government. Also, the project has suggested new ways of providing various social amenities such as balwadis, schools, health care and community centers. Ways by which required open spaces could be provided through comprehensive planning, inspite of the high FSI that is expected to be consumed, has been yet another contribution. Most importantly, the successful

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formation of over 200 cooperative societies and a Mahasangh, necessary for self-governance, has been a significant lesson.

Though voluntary efforts and struggles like that of the slum communities of the Sanjay Gandhi National Park are a beacon, on the larger canvas of Mumbai, the key to solving the complex problems of housing lies with the government. It must stop its approach of making cosmetic changes and instead come up with a slew of policy measures which will bring long-term relief to the poor and homeless. In a word, it must abandon its reliance on the 'free market' to solve the housing problem and must intervene aggressively to create pools of land banks and housing stock aimed at providing affordable homes. In the post neo-liberalisation period since 1991, governments have parted with substantial public land and other resources to private developers in the belief that all development, including public housing and social infrastructure, would be provided by them. Not surprisingly, the privatisation of development has miserably failed in providing any relief or solution to the housing crisis, as also for other needs such as affordable health care and education.

(7) Affordable Housing:

The 'Model State Affordable Housing Policy for Urban Areas, 2014', by the Ministry of Housing & Poverty Alleviation (MHUPA) in India defines affordability as thus: "Generally affordability is taken as 3-4 times the annual income. However in all schemes and projects where subsidy is offered by the State/Central Governments for individual dwelling units with a carpet area of not more than 60 sq. m., then the price range of a maximum of 5 times the annual income of the household, either as a single unit or part of a building complex with multiple dwelling units will be taken as affordability entitlement."

(Quotes from Nivara Hakk publication co-authored by Das, Singh & Dewan)

Das, Singh and Dewan (Year) suggest that 'Affordability' in the context of housing is a much-abused term and means different things to different people. It is frequently used in relation to income, the connotation changing as income levels vary. Lack of an 'affordable' home to the poor means they are forced to lead a life devoid of the basic human right to a dignified and safe dwelling.

It is in the context of the urban poor that the lack of affordable housing becomes a multi-faceted form of deprivation. Often the lack of affordability results in the household having to spend a large proportion of its meagre income on housing and thus having a substantially reduced amount to spend on its other needs (Kutty, 2005). This negatively impacts the ability of the household to spend on non-housing essentials such as food, health care and education. The affordability problem thus contributes to an increase in

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other forms of deprivation as well.

As housing layouts go further away from the city centre, the dwellings become more affordable (Gopalan, et al, 2015). However, the economic cost and time cost of transportation increases. In that sense, the housing cost is replaced by transportation cost (ibid.). In the context of Mumbai, given the linear topography of the city, the travel time from the periphery to the workplace can be as much as 2.5 hours. It is also important to consider the 'liveability' of the dwelling and the surrounding areas. It is a crucial component of housing that physical infrastructure and amenities are provided in the area where the dwelling is located (ibid). It is not enough to provide affordable homes, but liveability is also significant.

Costs related to maintenance, power, water and property tax also needs to be taken into account (ibid). Often, it has been observed that slum dwellers settled in formal housing find it difficult to pay these costs given their meagre incomes. As a result, they move out and shift to another slum where the purchase price and/or rent would be cheaper while informally letting out their property or selling it. Similarly, in many slum redevelopment projects, certain beneficiary slum dwellers have sold or rented their tenements to move to cheaper places, including other slums, in order to meet healthcare, educational and other social needs. Hence, it is important to take into account the many factors and costs for the successful achievement of the target of accommodating all citizens in formal housing. "Adequate shelter means more than a roof over one's head: It also means adequate privacy; adequate space; physical accessibility; adequate security; adequate lighting and ventilation; adequate basic infrastructure – all of which should be available at affordable cost" (High Level Task Force on Affordable Housing for All, India, December 2008, p. 7).

There has also been a tectonic shift in various governments' perspective – from an understanding that housing is a social function to housing as a commodity that should be monetised to the fullest extent. In doing so, governments have often aimed at extracting the maximum possible price for land under its control. Consequently, the price of the land in the city and its neighbourhood has increased sharply. Land being the most crucial and most substantial part of the cost structure of a housing unit, this monetisation has contributed to housing becoming unaffordable for the majority of the population.

The need for shelter is a basic human need and every city must be able to provide its citizens with a safe, secure and affordable home without the constant threat of forced eviction and displacement. The evidence from the data in India for example, suggests the failure of the market in providing affordable housing to the citizens of the city. The government on its part has preferred to turn a Nelsonian eye to this unfolding tragedy.

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V. Way Forward

The UN Habitat III conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development held in Quito, Ecuador in mid-October 2016, has published various issue papers for discussion and finalisation. In the chapter on Housing it states:

(1) “Adequate housing was recognised as a part of the right to an adequate standard of living in international instruments including the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights” (Government of India is a signatory to this covenant).

(2) “Adequate housing must provide more than four walls and a roof. A number of conditions must be met before particular forms of shelter can be considered to constitute adequate housing”. One of these conditions that is significant is: “Affordable housing is not adequate if its cost threatens or compromises the occupants’ enjoyment of other human rights”. Provision of affordable and adequate housing must be therefore judged from an assessment of its success or failure in terms of human rights.

(3) “The solution of housing challenges cannot depart from addressing the root causes that violate the principles of non-discrimination and equality in the access to housing, not only on the basis of gender and geography, but also on the basis of race, culture, religion, age, disability and social and economic status”. In short, such an assessment suggests that housing is not a commodity that can be manufactured in repeated and monotonous building blocks, packed without open spaces and social amenities with the sole obsession of maximising financial turnover, currently the single most dominating factor in the dysfunctional markets. The Habitat III issue paper further states:

(4) “Inadequate housing has contributed to health inequality and risk exposure. The home is a major environment of exposure to hazards and health threatening factors due to lack of habitability, overcrowding, and inadequate services, among others. Crowding is among the most serious threats as it enhances the transmission of diseases amongst the household members, especially children, elders and those with disabilities as they spend more of their time at home. In addition, many environmental risks are associated with the poor quality of housing structures and their location”. Both private and government housing finance agencies have considered housing finance through mortgages. In this regard, the Habitat III issue paper on housing states:

(5) “Enabling housing finance through mortgages has been quite well responded to by governments but has often been feasible for the middle- and high-income groups rather than the most needy 60 to 80 percent of the population. Subsidies on residential mortgages have encouraged people to borrow but they are flowing to the 20 to 40

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percent richest income groups, that is those who need least”.

Today, urbanization is one the key global issues of significance. Governments would have to take big steps in making important commitments beyond the free-market for the achievement of equality and justice, ensuring access to land, housing and amenities by all. Paramount in such an endeavor is ecological and environmental basis of development, not just protecting natural assets but nourishing and expanding them, in order to build an integrated and sustainable ecology of cities. It is this unification of the fragmented city landscapes, through participatory and democratic means that will enable the achievement of urbanisation of cities for now and the future. Our collective decisions should support these objectives and define the next steps for localisation and implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

Author’ note: This paper is an outcome of my experiences in the city of Mumbai and the ideas and thoughts expressed in my writings and talks over the years, as an architect and active member Nivara Hakk which is an housing rights movement. The paper makes substantial references to Nivara Hakk publications, including quoting select text from them. Similarly, references are made to and quotes drawn from my writings in ‘Nature of Cities” blog. I have also relied upon and quoted Justin Mcguirk writings in his book Radical Cities: Across Latin America in Search of A New Architecture.

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