

**WHY NDZ?**  
**IN MUMBAI'S DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

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Let's discuss how to utilize all the NDZ land in the city and prepare a blueprint for its planned development. This is essential at this crucial juncture when we find that large parts of the NDZ are being systematically put into the real-estate business. Before losing this vital contingent land for the planned growth of the city it is necessary for us to initiate a public debate for its planned utilization to meet with our needs of today.

NDZ land are essentially earmarked in town-planning and in the planning of a city to meet with future requirements that cannot be projected at the time of the preparation of the development plan. Simultaneously it is meant to maintain a population balance in the city in consistency with the infrastructure provision. Cities and towns are planned and its services and infrastructure are built for a stipulated population. To control and maintain the population balance land in measured quantum is released for development for various purposes based on town planning norms with regard to density, workplaces, residences, industry, parks, gardens, and other public open-space. Then every ten years as in the case of Mumbai, the development plan is reviewed and revised to meet with the challenges of the time. That means the need for a critical review of the social condition of the city in all its facets, be it housing or offices; amenities or services and infrastructure; social institutions or open spaces.

Biggest need of Mumbai today is land for housing of the poor. Development of the city and particularly its environment is possible only by undertaking the development of the slums and the living condition of the poor. This has to not only be understood but also accepted by all quarters in the larger interest of the city. The problem lies here. Upper and the middle class in their lust for appropriation and access to the various resources do not accept this fact and sharing with the rest. Informations are even distorted and wrongly put forward only to fool themselves and heighten class tensions in the city. Democracy and rights are merely seen as instruments for this appropriation thereby denying equal access to the city's resources by the poor and the working class. Some people can fool a few for some time but they cannot fool all the people all the time. Movements will inevitably grow demanding just utilization of the city's resources including land.

NDZ land will have to be planned for development to meet with the requirements of today. Majority of it would have to be designated for the housing of the poor. Large tracts of land having important reservations have been kept unutilized due to the poor residing on them without alternative. Even forests, beaches and sites for open-space etc have been lost thus, contributing to the city's decay. It is necessary to clear many of these sites in a phased manner for social and environmental development. The relocation and rehabilitation of the 'basti's' of the poor have to then be undertaken on land released from the NDZ as there is no other vacant government land available. Also the failure to implement progressive social policies like the ULC Act has led to land shortage for social purposes. The government too is pauperized for this vital resource. This attempt will not further densify nor add to the city's population. It will also not put additional load on the available services and infrastructure as all these people have been for all these years living and drawing on the city's services at their original sites. Rehabilitation and an effective rehabilitation policy are anyway important aspects in planning and hallmark of a progressive city.

Planned utilization of the NDZ land will also not lead to depletion of open-space in the city rather, will enable its clearance. NDZ is not an open space reservation. Open-spaces are maintained under various reservations in the development plan of the city such as Parks (P), Playgrounds (PG), Recreation ground

(RG), Garden (G), Swimming pool (S), Fish drying ground (FG), apart from land for various services, amenities and social infrastructure. If adequate land can be generated with infrastructure support for housing then we can recover large tracts of reserved open-spaces. Before its too late and before all the land under NDZ is lost in the real estate for the development of commercial premises and more housing for speculative investment, we need to campaign and unitedly fight for its planned integration in phases with the city's development. NDZ conversion is thus not environmentally damaging but a plan for its protection and development. Today, the environmental movement fails to contribute to major debates on development policy and implementation programs. What is needed instead is that the environmental concern must be seen as an integral part of housing and development programmes. The housing question would have to be at the core of environmental discussion thus, closely relating the environmental concerns to the needs of people, in the process forging an effective socio-environmental movement.

We are interested in development and not underdevelopment of the city. In this case we have to democratically plan our land-use including NDZ for the city's environmental and social development. No-development attitude by small groups of environmentalists and citizen forums is leading to the underdevelopment of the city. This approach compounds the crisis and increases disparity. Failure to adequately and justly deal with the city's growth is alarming. Our city planners too have failed to timely meet with the demands for land for housing, resulting in the ~~present~~ proliferation of slums and land grab by developers. How can we maintain land within the city limit without any designated use? This is a failure in planning for the city Planning involves designation of land-use even if certain areas have to be used or allowed for development at a later date. How else can the development plan be cohesive and comprehensive?. To leave out large chunks of land as No Development Zone is to open a back door to manipulation and land grab by the mighty.