

REHABILITATION OF THE URBAN POOR & CITY DEVELOPMENT
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We are here to discuss the issue of resettlement and rehabilitation of the Urban Poor. Also I would like to discuss our role i.e., role of Housing Activists and Organizations in resettlement and rehabilitation programme. It is time that we critically evaluate our own position.

Both the above matters require critical scrutiny particularly under the present globalization trend and privatization of development and what has been the adverse impact of it on housing of the working class and the urban poor.

The subject of resettlement and rehabilitation is rather vast, encompassing a wide spectrum of issues and complexities. I would like to therefore limit my discussion under the three following heads :-

- (1) "Right to Stay"
- (2) Short-circuiting city development plan and
- (3) Resettlement and Rehabilitation.

(A) "Right to stay" :

'Right to stay' has been sadly reduced to merely an act of negotiating space in the city. This act has come into being as the most important programme for a majority of housing rights organizations. Unfortunately, most movements begin and end with demands against eviction. While opposing and stopping eviction is necessary in the interim period, to consider that as the only programme in our housing struggle is a setback to the future of housing rights movement. While the right to stay is an important step in the democratic rights movement its impact on the planning and development for our cities has been counter-productive particularly in the development of housing and living environment.

Let us begin with a brief review of the present condition of slum-dwellers in urban India. Slums are usually dense. This means that the houses are too closely built in a haphazard manner. They lack desired sanitation and sewage. There is no common open space available in the slums. Children live and grow miserably playing in and around nalahs and gaps between houses if there is any at all. There are also many social pressures on living in high density settlements without open space. Such densities are hazardous to fire and other emergencies. In short the living condition and the environment that exist in slums is highly undesirable. We can never support the continuation of this critical environmental/living condition. *and inhumanly wretched*

There are slums which are also situated dangerously, vulnerable to land-slides, floods, drainage over-flow, etc. Slums that are located along major roads and along railway tracks are vulnerable to over-running traffic. Mostly children are victims of fatal accidents that regularly happen in slums such located.

There are also large number of slums in our cities that occupy land that have various other reservations in the development plan of the city. Slums are found on side open spaces between buildings and on pavements. While we have slums in various situations and their existence on present sites undesirable, we still have to fight for their right to stay. This demand is important because of the absence of any alternate resettlement and rehabilitation plan where people can move and live in dignity. The point that is important for our discussion is not about the right to stay, but about altering our city's development plans and land-use designations for equitable distribution of land, amenities and infrastructure. Our movements have lacked vision in planning for our cities in which the urban poor and the working class can equitably benefit from planned developments.

We have to challenge the present land-use maps, development plans, nature and priority of schemes, infrastructure and transport proposals, etc., that all individuals shortly and together are against the poor people's interest. But what are our alternatives? Alternatives in which cities can be better planned for the vast majority of the working class and the Urban poor and a plan in which adequate and desirable housing can be promoted.

What is our own philosophy for city planning and land-use? How do we intervene and stop the on going colonization of space and misappropriation and misutilisation of vital resources. How do we check the present development trend and not merely get stuck in the negotiation for marginal and secondary spaces while getting dwarfed and doomed by contrary developments?

Can we create our own data-base that will help our activists. A good data-base will help us in planning movements and give insight into various strategies for interventions. It will also help us in the redrawing of the development plan of our cities, our way. Can our demand for equity in urban space and equal access to cities' resources lead to a planned reconfiguration of urban land?

Limited demand for mere regularization and right to stay is the same principle and approach that our land-sharks and real-estate developers use for their interest. They are constantly trying to regularize their own illegal occupation of land and resources. If both the ruling elite and the working class including the urban poor follow the same path for their individual interest our cities will die due to unplanned growth.

"Violation of urban laws become not just the accepted but the expected way of city life. This has become a sub-standard for proactive urban planning. Such attempts at willful modification of the city development plan does not urge well for urban development.

Right to stay is also a popular slogan of opportunist politicians. These people do not even remotely relate the right to stay with to long term development or planning for the city. The constant uncertainty arising out of this short-term outlook has contributed immensely to the underdevelopment of the city in general and of housing for the working class in particular.

Responsible activists contributing to mass movements have to be careful and answerable to long term city development vision and objective, while tactically dealing with immediate need of the right to stay.

How do we promote and plan for this dual process. What is our capability and preparedness? Along with the larger number of social and political activists engaged in our organisations we need to on urgent basis mobilize professionals participation. Most of our movements lack adequate knowledge about physical planning, construction, land-use, sanitation, water-supply etc. We need to involve architects, planners, geographers and others in our organization to evolve a new and radical vision of development. Eventhough not many architects and planners have the ability and commitment to learn about and grow with social movements, we still have to get them in to enrich our struggle and develop our practices.

We have seen in the past, growing differences and conflicts between professional interest and mass organisational ideas. Very often the steps taken and the ideas of the professionals are misplaced and irrelevant. Their communicative skills and languages are unfriendly and not understood by ordinary people.

Simultaneously, our activists and leaders in the forefront fail to invite new people and imbibe new ideas in different directions. Mostly generalists dominate our discussions and decisions on all matters including in planning and other technical housing questions. Even when a few architects and planners come to support mass movements they shy away, alienated and left out. It is therefore necessary for both that is our forefront activists and professionals to initiate a dialogue and evolve ways to function together to develop our movements. It is for a similar reason, that the World Social Forum is significant. It is a "movement of movements" and an opportunity for developing and building stronger ties amongst groups who are committed to democratic principles and who also strongly oppose the present trend of globalization i.e., stifling us and our freedom and increasingly sea hiding the toiling masses. The WSF provides a meeting ground necessary for all of us to come together, start talking to one another and work ways to enhance each others strength. Keeping with this WSF motto we as housing activists and organizations have to simultaneously initiate dialogues amongst ourselves with critical introspection. The slogan "Here another world is possible". put forward by the WSF is note worthy.

While I have argued that we need to understand city planning and developmental work in the working class interest and work towards a fair implementation of the same, we need to simultaneously question the development plan that sets out corrupt and unbalanced reservations and demands. Most development plans are mere physical mappings but reflect a strong social and political agenda contrary to the interest of the working class.

Right to stay has also led to a convenient nexus between the encroachers, land-grabbers, opportunists and the various authorities including politicians. Growing nexus of these groups has led to anarchy in planning and development. It has also led to the growth in criminalisation in all spheres of urban life including in the housing sector.

(B) Short-circuiting city development plan :

Most of our cities development plans are irrelevant to the needs of the city and its people. They do not respond to the present demands for e.g., adequate land for housing of the urban poor is never provided in the land use plan for our cities. In a city like Mumbai while 65% of its population live in slum, they occupy a mere 8% of land and that too as encroachers. There is no land in planning to meet with the housing requirement of the vast majority of the cities' population. Development plans of our cities also lack adequate open space, particularly for the poor and the working class. Instead there is an ever increasing activity in the construction and development of exclusive Shopping Centers, Air-conditioned markets, Entertainment Malls, etc., which restrict access to the poor. More importantly this trend in city development encourages the depletion of vital resources and colonisation space for exclusive interest

Ghettoisation: As a result of the marginalisation of the poor in the development plan for our cities, the settlement of the urban poor get ghettoized. Ghettoisation of people on class basis is counter productive to social development and prosperity of a city. These ghettoized settlements are intensely cluttered and cloistered having inadequate and sub-standard amenities and infrastructure. Supporting the growth of such exclusive colonies of the poor in our cities is furthering discrimination and marginalisation.

Our cities are therefore sharply divided. This undesirable division perpetuates unhealthy social environment in the city. Social tension rise as a result often sparking violence in many ways. The ghettoized settlements get further marginalised from the main stream of development leading to deterioration of the living environment. As slums grow, the environmental condition of the city gets badly effected. Growth of slums in our cities lead to sharp decline in the city environmental condition thereby, slumming our cities constantly.

Ghettoisation of the urban poor has led to a sharp division of people in the city. The ruling elite including large sections of the middle class are against slum-dwellers. They even oppose recognition of housing rights of the poor and provision of infrastructure and services to them. "Citizens oppose slum-dwellers", is the common press language today. Citizens have begun to question the very existence of the poor.

In our cities today, the slum improvement and redevelopment schemes seemingly in favour of the slum-dwellers has actually a secondary and ancillary place to the main-stream development projects. Slums redevelopment is seen as a relief activity based upon sympathy and goodwill and not necessarily as recognition of the right to housing. Most often the role of the slum dwellers are not considered at all in the housing programmes for them. Their capabilities are ignored. The slum dwellers themselves are thus alienated from housing projects. The case of the slums redevelopment scheme launched by the Government of Maharashtra is a vivid example of this. The slums redevelopment scheme is essentially to a scheme derive profits from slums land. In most instances it is seen that this programme has actually led to forced displacements. Massive incentives are offered to the builders and developers under this policy by way of additional FSI and transfer of development rights. FSI on slum land is raised from 1 to 2.5. It is expected that the developers will provide free houses to the slum dwellers and sell the balance in open market after housing the slum dwellers free. The concept of providing freehouses to the slum dwellers is again an abuse to the very right and dignity of the urban Poor and the working class. This trend is demeaning to democracy and democratic rights movements. Slum dwellers are in no control of the development for them, rather they are subject to further oppression and discrimination. Slum dwellers in Mumbai have realized the contradiction of the slum redevelopment programme right from its inception. As a result there has been virtually no significant progress in the redevelopment of slum lands in Mumbai under this scheme.

Fund Allocation for slum dwellers housing and slum redevelopment is again a secondary and relief allocation. Infact the development of housing for the urban poor is seen as a burden and unnecessary expenditure. Fund allocation, for slum improvement is seen as diversion of funds for non productive purposes. Hence the redevelopment policy and programme proposes several dubious ways for raising the required funds for slums redevelopment, as in the case of the slums redevelopment programme of the Government of Maharashtra. The State as we know has virtually abducted its responsibility for social housing. Simultaneously it has rested this responsibility on Builders & Developers and expects the market to cater to the housing needs of the urban poor. Interestingly the State is offering finances both by way of grants and loan to developers for undertaking real-estate development on slum land. Shiv Shai Prakalp scheme (SRS) in Maharashtra is an example of rampant corruption and misuse of public funds. The question is therefore not one of shortage of funds or finances but of misappropriation and misutilisation of it.

(C) Resettlement & Rehabilitation :

What is our alternate suggestion for a planned development of slums and housing promotion for the urban poor integrated with the main stream development and land-use plan of our cities. What is our plan for raising funds for development of rehabilitation sites. What will be our relationship with the market. How do we deal with the increasing corporatisation under the present globalisation trend.

There are yet many more questions relating to the issue of recognition and cut-off-dates. The very right of existence is questioned by various State policies and programs. People beyond the cut- of- date set out by different city authorities and States are not entitled to rehabilitation upon demolition and eviction of their houses. This is a serious fundamental and constitutional violation. We have failed to adequately deal with such discriminatory policies. How can our movements challenge such fundamental human rights question in the struggle for housing?

The State plays games continuously when it comes to providing land for rehabilitation. In the absence of land reservation for housing of the urban poor in the development plans for our cities, the Government puts up their hands when it comes to finding land. The Central Government Agencies like the Bombay Port Trust or the Railways or the Airport Authorities do not accept policies laid down by the respective State Governments. As a result the announced schemes are not allowed implementation and then declared as a policy. Land is just not made available by the State for housing and rehabilitation of the urban poor. The Central Government had introduced the Urban Land Ceiling & Regulation Act in 1971 with an idea to recover vacant surplus urban land and utilize them for housing of the poor. But the due to mounting pressure from the building industry the same has been abolished. Today the Government lacks vital resources including land for social housing and also for other social development projects.

As Organizations of the Urban poor, we have to ensure that struggle for housing rights is seen as a part of a larger struggle for democratic rights. Alliances promoted through the larger struggle will provide direction for poor peoples' access to vital resources. The larger struggle would have to challenge the present Globalization trend and increased Corporatisation, which are rapidly marginalising our people from participation and development. The development models that are being promoted are contrary to the interest of the majority population.

It is in this context that the initiatives at the World Social Forum are significant. Our struggle for the housing of the working class and the urban poor is a part of the larger political struggle based upon the broad objectives being discussed at the WSF against the rapidly growing militarisation and international imperialist hegemony.

There are two critical components that affect the housing question - land and development. Development installation, infrastructure and construction. The manner in which these two key components are controlled, regulated and utilized influences the relevance or the irrelevances of them to the interest of the urban poor and the working class in general.