

DELFT PRESENTATION

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HOUSING BEYOND MARKETS:

Slums Redevelopment & Affordable Housing
Case of Mumbai

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Question of affordable housing and slums rehabilitation & redevelopment (R&R) in particular, is a big and complex one. In Mumbai for example, over five million people, constituting approximately 50% of the city's population, live in slums but occupy just about 15% of the total developable land area of approximately 240 sq.km. Insufficient and often absent formal affordable housing availability in the city, has historically led to the proliferation of slums.

To add misery to this alarming scale of the housing crisis, neo-liberalization and privatization that the country in 1991 committed to pursue, has added further fuel to the fire. Both federal and state governments stopped producing mass housing that they were committed to upon independence in 1947 as a part of their social development responsibility. Today, governments consider their role as facilitators to private agencies, preaching market led development mantra. This mantra has clearly not worked in improving the housing crisis, rather it has worsened the situation whereby more and more people, including the middle class besides the poor, find it hard to access high-cost formal housing available in the open market.

2 Slides of Sanjay Gandhi Nagar

In order to understand this complexity of the housing crisis in India, and Mumbai in particular, which would also have similar reflections in many cities across other countries; I will present the case of 'Sanjay Gandhi Nagar', a slum in Mumbai as an example. The journey of the people of this slum from demolition and eviction of their settlement in Nariman Point- a high cost business district in the city, to its rehabilitation and subsequent redevelopment in a distant suburban site in Goregaon- twenty kilometers away, is synonymous with my journey too, until the time of its current redevelopment.

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I will begin my presentation with a brief understanding of cities that hugely impact “homes” that people build or struggle to achieve and how the current urbanization and city-making trend is dividing cities and producing more backyards of exclusion and abuse than ever before. Thereafter, present an understanding of today’s popular preoccupation by governments, NGO’s, slum lords and brokers, including in many instances slum dwellers themselves, in negotiating for concessions from developers. Then I will put forward certain key demands beginning with the land question; and participatory planning and design as a right (through an illustration of ‘Sangharsh Nagar’ a slum-dwellers rehabilitation project) along with the demand for open mapping and data. This will, hopefully, facilitate in evolving certain alternatives for affordable housing and slums redevelopment and their integration with the city.

In conclusion, I argue that the housing question is fundamentally a democratic right’s struggle, providing an effective platform for achievement of the “Right to City” objective.

Affordable Housing Context –

1.Divided cities:

The case of Sanjay Gandhi Nagar in Mumbai, as the case of slums in other cities, is a distinct example of forced polarization of communities, the recycling and relocation of the discriminated backyards, denial of a host of fundamental rights to excluded communities, brute force and violence perpetrated by the state, displacements due to demolitions and evictions, sophisticated yet pretentious policies by governments reaffirming exclusion and discrimination, sustaining a constant state of uncertainty in poor peoples existence and the assertion of the market forces in undermining affordable and participatory development options and finally the commoditization of housing.

(Sanjay Gandhi Nagar Slides)

As I understand, cities are an incredible opportunity for forging collective and co-operative endeavors. It is for this reason that we consider city planning and design solutions as an effective tool of social and environmental change. With this objective being our pillar of strength, access to formal housing by all becomes a mandatory condition of

urbanization. It is in this context that I consider the process of developing affordable Housing an effective political instrument for mobilization and engagement of people from the beginning and at all stages, leading to the democratization of housing and the city.

Sadly, current trend of urbanization as we experience propagates the opposite, i.e. to divide our cities into contesting spaces and communities.

Production of backyards- As for me, I am constantly disturbed by this fact that growth of urbanization is increasingly breaking down our cities into disparate fragments, both in social and spatial terms. Indeed our cities are producing and re-producing backyards of exclusion, discrimination, neglect and abuse; even natural habitats are being systematically destroyed leading to increasing levels of intolerance, and social unrest and environmental threat, undermining the very idea of cities. These trends are evident too in the case of Sanjay Gandhi Nagar.

Slums: At this point I would like to briefly express my understanding of slums, how they come about and what their social and political conditions are.

Slums: Slums too are treated as the backyards of cities reflecting a bundle of oppressive conditions. They are ridden with many conflicts and contradictions. The state of equality or inequality in cities is also sharply reflected in the life in slums. Slum dwellers are subject to miserable life and living conditions with deplorable state of physical environment and oppressive social conditions. Living in such condition takes a huge toll on the bodies and minds of slum dwellers.

Slum dwellers have built houses and set up their homes in slums not exercising their freedom of choice but under a state of rigorous controls. Their self-built homes are not a reflection of their preferred way of life or expression of their social and cultural ethos, neither a reflection of their design ideas and choice of construction materials. Houses in slums are self-built housing, but in no way they demonstrate any real alternative for the development of affordable housing. They are a reflection of a state of captivity and subjugation and surrender to powerful forces- official and un-official, that exercise control over public resources, including slum land, for profit.

As a matter of fact, such slum conditions cannot continue for ever nor be reaffirmed through cursory slum improvement schemes? We hear too many times from many architects and NGO's romanticizing houses in slums that people have built. They work in providing solutions for their improvement, incremental construction for their expansion etc. Some have gone to the extent of praising poor peoples enterprise in building their houses and how slums too are "cities within cities" for the economic activity that they pursue in the informal sector. Politically speaking, such romanticisation is to confirm their segregation and discrimination as opposed to their integration with the city.

Design solutions suggesting conservation and retrofitting including incremental expansion of houses, will only lead to further congestion and misery. Building further upon these weak & rotten foundations cannot be considered a step forward in the movement for equality and justice, nor would such an approach contribute to the liberation of the slum dwellers from the clutches of exploitation that govern their settlements and life.

Sadly, while cities are expanding, public spaces are rapidly shrinking, in both physical and democratic terms. This means space for wider public participation and dialogue are shrinking.

It is in this backdrop, I would like to submit that the housing question must only be discussed along with larger issue of city planning and development programs. Also, on understanding of how current city plans reflect various social, cultural & political ideas and structures that support or subvert the idea of just and equal cities.

2. Right's to Concessions Trend:

From rights to concessions is yet another oppressive social and political trend that has come to prevail, particularly evident in the neo-liberalised world. This phenomenon is also evident in the recent redevelopment project of Sanjay Gandhi Nagar. In early eighties when the demolition and eviction of Sanjay Gandhi Nagar took place, peoples protests and marches were headed to the government headquarters with the objective of meeting the chief minister or the concerned ministers. But today, since 1991 year of liberalisation in India, peoples protests and marches are taken to private builders and developers offices. In meetings with them, concessions are sought instead of claiming their rights. Such deals have over the years, not only diluted the real strength of peoples power, but has substantially undermined participatory democracy and vitiated the environment for public opinion as being important.

Slides

It is only when there are people's uprisings, which happen very little these days, that the governments begin to grant fringe or peripheral benefits to the public under the guise of public largesse, without altering the very foundations upon which colonization, exclusivity and private empires are built across cities. Increasing commodification under expanding markets has engulfed basic social and human development needs, and has substantially eroded fundamental rights of most people.

Housing rights movements led by Nivara Hakk, as in the cases of Sanjay Gandhi Nagar and Sangharsh nagar, has forced governments to reluctantly recognize land rights of the poor. But, policy after policy continues to doll out concessions to regulate people's demands in measured doses, without altering the fundamental premise of permitting land grab and appropriation of other public resources for real estate business interests by private agencies, thereby subverting the very potential of affordable housing provision.

Key Demands & A Way Forward for “Housing the Crowd” (as a question in your INDESEM program for this session)

1. Committing Land First for Affordable Housing:

We have to bring land back to center stage in our discussion; over the years, as countries have committed to neoliberal globalization, the allocation of land for poor and middle class people has been pushed to the backstage. Substantial public land has been gifted away by governments and/or captured and colonized by private developers, who have been mandated to carry out development works, including public housing. Therefore, questions related to just utilization of land are not being considered relevant any more, as they would impinge on the freedom of free market forces. This ongoing model of development has not worked in favour of the public interest, nor has it contributed to public good.

In the case of Sanjay Gandhi Nagar, the central struggle by the people and Nivara Hakk was based on the demand for land rights. Therefore, demolition and eviction was challenged. A long battle, including a hunger strike by two eminent people- Shabana Azmi and Anand Patwardhan, led to victory of some sorts. While the original land of their settlement in the city was cleared by the government for other projects, alternate land was provided in suburban Goregaon to the slum dwellers on ownership. This

land was privately owned, but the government negotiated with owner to sell it to the slumdweller at much lower price than the prevailing market price.

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Housing for all is a significant aspect of development agenda, as it most directly with the land question and various other resources. While issues relating to equity in land and land use are addressed through urban planning, the adverse land-person ratio in most cities demands the consideration and achievement of collective ownership and sharing as an inevitable condition.

Collective ownership and sharing are therefore important in the larger interest of democratizing housing and the achievement of “Right to the city” objective. Implicit in the demand for collective ownership and sharing of all resources is the achievement of certain key principles of democracy, liberty; i.e. equality and fraternity- implying solidarity of the excluded and discriminated people in particular, mutual respect, trust and support. Such aspirations can be partially if not fully fulfilled by exercising affordable housing plans.

David W. Harvey, who speaks of “the urbanisation of class struggle” in his book ‘Rebel Cities’, defined the right to the city as “far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city.” Rather, he says, “It is a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights.”

Focus on affordable housing - As I said earlier, the Sanjay Gandhi Nagar struggle was primarily over the issue of land rights. In cities, more so in metropolitan centers, cost of land is high. In Mumbai for example, land price constitute nearly 70% of the total real estate value of buildings. This factor in the pricing of real estate makes even the smallest house- as is being defined as affordable unit by the federal government announced in a recent budget, unaffordable even to the middle class. Sanjay Gandhi Nagar slumdweller could successfully resettle on the new site because of

the state government intervention in fixing a substantially low land price as compared to the prevailing market price then.

In design and development terms, we followed a simple self-help principle for construction of houses. Nivara Hakk along with PKDas & Associates architects, prepared an overall layout plan in which 300 odd plots were carved out for allocation to individual slum dwellers. Also, land for common amenities, roads etc. was earmarked in the layout. People then built their houses as per their individual choice and affordability. There were variety of houses and expressions as a result, configured by the master plan guidelines and a set of mutually agreed development control regulations. But in this rehabilitation project, there was no compulsion to consume the entire permissible FAR. Therefore, this self-help housing project worked successfully.

UN Habitat-III Conference Quito, Equador : With participatory in the 'Right to City' session, I had made two specific demands that we hoped will be accepted by all participating nations and included into the final declaration. One, commit adequate land for affordable housing and then actively undertake direct responsibility in building affordable housing stock and amenities, for the achievement of just, equal, and sustainable cities. Two, prepare city development plans accepting existing land occupation, patterns, including the settlements of the poor and the informal sector work places. This approach would check the huge burden of displacements that we fail to mitigate. But, sadly, though not surprisingly, these commitments by way of a joint declaration by member nations did not happen. We had also hoped, based on Habitat-III published pre-conference documents expressing doubts about dependency on markets for the production of affordable housing was taken forward as a joint declaration. This did not happen too.

2. Claiming Participation in Planning & Design as a Right:

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Besides achieving land free or beyond market price, participatory planning and design is necessary for the successful implementation of affordable housing. In the case of Sanjay Gandhi Nagar, it was possible to develop a sustainable housing alternative for both these reasons. The slum-dwellers participated actively along with Nivara Hakk activists to undertake planning, design and supervision of the implementation of their rehabilitation project.

In another more recent example involving rehabilitation of over 25,000 families evicted from the peripheral areas of Borivali National park, a participatory planning and design process was undertaken with mixed results. Apart from many successes, the failures have been primarily due to the fact that there are no official norms and procedures nor provisions in law for participatory planning and design of such rehabilitation projects. Authorities in charge of granting approvals of such schemes pose constant hindrances. People's opinion is seldom accepted, not even given a hearing. For example, the plans for inclusion of adequate open spaces; amenities such as schools and medical centers and markets were not approved, as they are no provisions in law. As a result, informal shops have opened up along various accesses, roads, and marginal open spaces, without waste disposal systems in place. Roads are blocked and garbage piled up everywhere.

In the interest of affordable housing for all Urban Planning & Design (UP&D) ought to be considered a 'Right' and brought to public dialogue. The democratization of UP&D, indeed of housing, would be a significant step towards the achievement of just and equal cities. Making provisions in law and exercising this right would be an effective means for bringing about much-needed socio-environmental change.

By claiming planning and design as a right, people across communities would no more be casually or cynically invited by governments to participate and respond to decisions *after* their formulation and announcement. Rather, they would have opportunities to engage in the process of decision making right from inception of plans, deciding the objectives and intent of proposals.

Public perception in India is that planning requires exclusive knowledge and only few are capable. This must be de-mystified and expose its bluff. It is important for people to not merely respond to change but envision change. Most important, the democratization of UP&D would hopefully facilitate unification of the fractured cityscapes and heal deep social and cultural fissures.

Urban planning along with affordable housing plans 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 participatory planning and housing achieves significance as an instrument for building resistances to this current phenomenon of fragmentation of cities and for bringing about much needed socio-environmental change towards unification & equity.

3. Collective Mapping :

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Collective mapping of urban landscapes is crucial for taking stock of our land and resources and achieving open data. Mapping is a socio-political act and must be understood as such in order to enable wider participation.

Such an act would also mandate wider public dialogue into historical evidences and studies, while evolving alternate plans for now and the future.

Nivara Hakk and P.K.Das & Associates were the first to carryout mapping of the extent of slum land in Mumbai. It revealed many concealed or suppressed data from public view. It also exposed many myths and bluffs that skewed public information and opinion. More importantly, the mapping effort and the results thereof facilitated Nivara-das team to conceive and prepare and propose to the government a cohesive slums redevelopment plan across the city and their integration with the development plan of the city in which slum land are excluded as being independent entities.

Maps are an insight into a nation's progress. Not maps that define national boundaries, but maps that define cities and neighborhoods. Maps that reveal the resources we have and how we share them. And the resources we may have lost. Maps that make us vigilant and protective.

4. Integration of Slums and Affordable Housing:

Nivara-Das plan for slums redevelopment and possibility of adequate construction of affordable housing and fulfill the housing deficit in Mumbai illustrates all the above thoughts and concerns that I put forward earlier.

Conclusion- Housing a Democratic Rights Struggle:

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In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that participatory urban planning and housing are incredible democratic tools of socio-political change for the achievement of equality and justice-legal, socio-economic and environmental, above all political towards the achievement of a new democratic order. This is a right that not only has the power to script

democratic endeavors, but influence transformations towards a sustainable urban ecology.

No individual democratic right would work and be successful by itself. Every right is inextricably linked with one another. Such intimate relationship between different rights creates conditions in which others strengthen individual rights.

This is true for participatory urban planning and housing rights too. Their integration with other rights movements is inevitable, rather a mandatory condition for successful achievement of “Right to City” objective.

Thank you all for your patient hearing.