

ActionAid India, Delhi General Assembly. 12th. July 2011.

SLUMS REDEVELOPMENT AND THE HOUSING QUESTION.

Chairperson Shabana Azmi, Exec Director Sandeep Chachra and Dear Friends,

One very important aspect of slums redevelopment and rehabilitation is physical planning and architecture. Physical transformation of the living conditions of the urban poor and the working class is undoubtedly important and necessary. Better built-environment not only provides dignity to all but also enables better family and community life and relationships.

This is important also because slum dwellers, their organizations and NGO's engaged in the housing sector have not paid adequate attention to this aspect. They have not paid attention not because they are not knowledgeable but because they believe it to be in the exclusive domain of planners and architects and or relied on governments to provide or fulfill this requirement.

Simultaneously professional planners and architects too have not engaged adequately in this sector, i.e. housing issues of the poor. Their indifference is rooted in their culture and historical understanding that their services are provided only when commissioned and patronized by the developers. As a result neither the movements nor the professionals have been able to sufficiently develop ideas and working methodologies for relevant housing solutions for the poor. This is indeed our challenge.

Fundamental to the housing question is land. In most of our cities land is denied to the poor. Even lands occupied by the poor are being forcibly and through dubious schemes being taken away for other developments. Most city development plans do not have any land earmarked for housing of the poor or for the promotion of affordable housing.

Simultaneously there is no production and supply of affordable housing for the poor and low middle class people. This is why slums proliferate. Our governments have backed out of this responsibility since 1991, the year of liberalization. The idea being that the private sector will undertake this responsibility with governments facilitating them. This policy has only led to the colonization of land and resources for private profit at the cost of social development.

Our first demand therefore is allocation of land in our cities for affordable housing for the masses. Provision of land would challenge the continuing state of uncertainty that completely destabilizes the poor in all aspects of their lives. This is what even the ministry of housing, government of India has recommended to the various States. In Mumbai Nivara Hakk has demanded that the lands occupied by slum-dwellers be reserved in the development plan of the city for affordable housing including the redevelopment of existing slums. This demand is pertinent in Mumbai like situation where there is no vacant land available with the government for social development projects including housing. We also know that private landowners will not dedicate their land for such purposes. Therefore this is the only way by which land can be legalized for the poor in our cities. The issue is not limited to the redevelopment and or rehabilitation of the existing slum-dwellers but also for fulfilling the shortage in housing supply for the poor and the lower middle-class for now and for the future. If the future is not addressed then new slums will continue to disfigure and destabilize our cities.

This situation is similar in most Indian cities. Only a few city plans, as in the case of Delhi, have land earmarked for housing of the poor in the Development Plan of the city. Under-utilization and mis-use of such reserved lands is another thing.

Various governments have devised dubious schemes with supporting policies in the name of the poor, to avoid allocation of land exclusively for this purpose. They have gone a step forward, as in the case of Maharashtra, to allow trading with lands occupied by slums for other commercial developments in-order, to cross subsidize free housing for the slum-dwellers. There are also mechanisms devised to reserve certain percentage of housing for the poor in all housing schemes. But our experience is that this does not work. The reserved houses are merged and sold as big houses thus, undermining the central objective. We know very well what happened under the ULCRA Act.

Mumbai's example as far as land question is concerned is important to evaluate. Nearly 9million people today live in slums in Mumbai and they occupy merely 9% of the city's land. About 82% of the population lives in one room abode, including slums. High density, deprivation and filth only speak of the state of our under-development, not development as we boast of under the neo-liberal globalization.

Equality and right of access to land by the poor and the middle-class is therefore the first demand, in our struggles for housing rights.

Second important issue is about surveys and mapping of slums. For us survey is an important social and political process in the battle for housing rights. This must be understood. We can no longer rely only on government surveyors to carry out this task. Nor is survey of slums merely a physical mapping exercise that technically equipped agencies should carry out all by themselves.

We all know how data is manufactured. Surveys are often influenced by developers to serve their commercial interest and land grabbing. We have to ensure joint surveys, jointly with our government representatives. Surveys have to be participatory. Local bodies, NGO'S and neighbors must play an important role in determining correct data. **More importantly the process of survey and mapping enables us to establish a close relationship with the community.**

Mapping of slums too is important in-order to understand the adverse impact of development plans of our cities and how larger city planning ideas have produced slums and continue to do so.

Thirdly a critical evaluation of city planning ideas for achieving equality and development justice is an important political act. I believe that planning and architecture are significant political instruments for social change. It is therefore necessary for us to democratize planning and make it participatory. I also believe that all the people, not just qualified professionals, can plan developments that affect their lives. These cannot continue to be the exclusive rights of a few.

Tragically today planning for larger public good is undermined in-order to facilitate privatization and free market. This commitment made by our governments has to be challenged for the achievement of equal cities.

On the other hand planning for slums redevelopment and affordable housing must follow town planning norms and principles equally as adopted for the planning and development of housing and amenities of others, without class discrimination. Development of social amenities and their integration with houses is important for social development of our majority people. These include affordable, education, health-care and recreation. **Housing is not just a game of numbers as made out to be. It is in the interest of the markets to consider the production of housing units as commodities.** Thus their production and financial turnover becomes most important. Does not matter if the housing models are oppressive, lacking privacy, open spaces and adequate lighting and ventilation. The lack of social amenities and open spaces is contributing to further slummification of our cities. **If we are to fight the slum like conditions then we have to intervene in the planning of our cities and slums redevelopment in particular.**

Planning issues also include matters such as FSI, Density and building heights. Today due to privatization and corporatization of slums redevelopment through programs such as the SRD in Mumbai, also being adopted in many other cities, slum-dwellers are completely marginalized from the development process. **“Corporatization is one element of growing deterioration in functioning of democratic institutions”.** It is for this reason that we are deeply concerned about the path that we are pursuing. The conspiracy with which the city and all its resources are being colonized along with the exclusion of more and more people from benefiting is pushing us to state of underdevelopment. Therefore, “it is of no wonder that the city appears as a space of conspiracy by the few behind the backs of the rest?” (Gyan Prakash – Mumbai Fables).

In conclusion I would like to say that the development of affordable mass housing, including slums redevelopment, is an effective democratic tool of social change and an instrument for mobilizing housing rights movements for equality and justice. Housing movements in the country must integrate with larger democratic rights movements for achieving larger social and political objectives.

It is absolutely necessary for us to evolve our alternatives through our movements that will effectively challenge the present form of urbanization. Otherwise we are forever squabbling over the spoils of mainstream projects and schemes. Increased role of governments along with people's participation, in the promotion of affordable housing and slums redevelopment is the way forward. **In-order to be effective in our participation I propose that we understand and pursue urban planning as an effective democratic tool of public action against the present forms of subjugation.** Therefore, I also propose that planning be recognized as a 'public right'. It is our responsibility to ensure that equal participation by our constituents is a necessary condition for planning. Planning issues and processes enables significant public dialogue and discourses. This is a necessary function of democracy.

Fourth, Case Studies:

- (a) Yerwada slums, Pune – This slum is being redeveloped under the Basic Services for Urban Poor (BSUP). This is essentially an in-situ project facilitated by the government of India under JNNURN. Under the scheme 50% funding is provided by the center, 20% by the State, 20% by the local Municipal Body and 10% by the slum-dwellers. Maximum funding up to Rs.3 lacs is paid to the designated NGO against each house undertaken for reconstruction. The maximum carpet area allowed under the scheme is 270 sq.ft. carpet.

The drawback is that kutcha houses invariably have very small footprint and therefore can expand only vertically. While other houses in the slums are already built pucca not an inch of additional space is generated for common interest, be they roads or open-spaces or services, etc.

Funding objective under this programme should have been the opposite. Priority should be given to services and infrastructure development. Also the policy is silent on the issue of tenure rights thus, allowing the state of uncertainty for the slum-dwellers to continue.

- (b) Sanjay Gandhi Nagar, Goregoan, Mumbai: This project implemented under self-help housing principle. The State Government has given the land. The slum-dwellers being owners of the land. Housing programme: It was decided that activists connected with the NHSS and the elected representatives of Sangharsh Nagar take the lead in these matters and monitor the housing programme. Institutional loans and donations to the society were not to be accepted, as these tend to become a burden and a tool for further oppression, exploitation and interference. It was also decided that they build their own houses like they built their slum with individual, financial arrangements.

We prepared a layout plan outlining the position of common toilets, water taps, community centre, society office, accesses and open-spaces.

Sadly, this Nagar as was built upon rehabilitation has been demolished to make way for a builder led redevelopment project under the present policy of the State government. In-spite of being owners of the land, the people here has chosen to have free multi-storied high-rise apartment buildings.

- (c) Sangarsh Nagar, Goregoan, Mumbai: This project is carried-out under slums redevelopment policy of Government of Maharashtra. The project involves the rehabilitation of slum-dwellers evicted from the Sanjay Gandhi National Park. The rehabilitation site at Chandivali, measuring about 34 hectares, will constitute a comprehensive and all-inclusive new town. The town with about 20,000 houses includes a large, 1.6 hectare naudab as uts cebtrak, social space. Two more playgrounds and over 60 community open spaces enliven its outdoors. More than 14 schools, medical facilities, including two hospitals, two large community halls and religious institutions, constitute its social infrastructure. Schools and community halls are annexed to these open spaces and playgrounds.

Each 22.5- square meter, well-lit and adequate ventilated house comprises a room and kitchen with a balcony and toilet.

Each pada (cluster) comprises two societies with 550 houses and 16 common units for balwadis, society offices, crèches, a women's centre and other common facilities. A Central court provides openness, light and ventilation. The common units abut this court. The entrance to each building is marked by a baithak, a meeting place alongside the central open space.

Every three clusters form a wadi (sector), which is serviced by a market place that houses shops, banks, post offices and other commercial establishments. Two primary schools are alongside such marketplaces, and their playgrounds provide relief to the crowds that gather there.

Low-rise (ground plus seven stories) clusters evolve into small, familiar neighborhoods and involve the people in the control, management and maintenance of their township.

A network of internal pedestrian streets connects the groups of houses to their markets, facilities and common recreation spaces and the gateways to the houses are on these streets. Walk-across pathways, shaded by pergolas, intersperse the clusters. These promote a sense of unity between the different parts of the development.

Fifth, Slum-dwellers are not citizens: Let me end with an important note regarding the issue of citizenship. “As globalization produces different kinds of legal regimes and citizens, new hierarchies of cities and urban dwellers, it poses a new set of questions for citizenship, identity and politics.” “The contemporary urbanization and its global processes and representatives have destroyed the halo of this modernist urbanism” (Gyan Prakash- Mumbai Fables). We have to challenge through our daily work, including through the physical planning and development process (as the policy for cut-off dates for recognition of slum-dwellers), the denial of citizenship to millions of poor people, mostly residing in slums and informal settlements of ‘urban India’.

Examples of the State perpetrating violence are too many. Evictions and demolitions in the Sanjay Gandhi National Park in Mumbai demonstrated this wherein; even the Courts actively participated in ordering violent interventions for the demolition of the slums. Army was deployed, helicopter surveillance ordered and orders banning entry of Nivara activists to the area was issued. Such actions by governments cannot defeat people’s movements.

Thank you, for inviting me to share my experiences with the ActionAid activists attending this General assembly.

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