

RAY:

Urban Housing & Poverty Alleviation.

'Slum-free' city is a metaphor for poverty alleviation in urban India. Physical transformation of the housing conditions of the poor is indeed one of the many important means for the achievement of this objective. RAY is therefore a significant policy guideline for enabling slums redevelopment, rehabilitation and promotion of affordable mass housing. Specific focus on these urban development aspects through RAY, is indeed important. These guidelines should not be diluted by expanding the area of concern to other simultaneously important poverty alleviation programs, in spite of their intrinsic relationships. Due to the vastness of our country, varying conditions and cities being administered independently by the individual states, it is necessary for the Government of India (GOI) to set-out common principles and guidelines for all as in RAY. But, it is also necessary for every state and city authority to quickly translate these principles and guidelines into relevant laws and effective implementation programmes. Therefore our focus is on these principles for enabling slum-free cities, particularly through slums redevelopment and construction of affordable housing.

Recognition Policy:

Recognition of all the slum dwellers and their equality in cities is truly the starting point of poverty alleviation policies and programs, including RAY.

Various state governments have different recognition policies, particularly on matters relating to slums redevelopment and rehabilitation. Recognition of slums and slum dwellers is fundamental to making cities slum-free, besides this issue being a vital a human rights issue. All the slum dwellers must be equally recognized and declared eligible for various social development programs, without any pre-conditions and or eligibility criteria.

We have realized over the years that poor people choose to move into cities for earning what they cannot earn back in their villages or small towns. Once in the city of their choice, they contribute to the economy and successful functioning of the city. We also have examples wherein poor people have moved from their first cities of residence to another for better job opportunities. Mere pleasure of living in cities at the cost of abandoning their homes and distancing from familiar social networks and relationships is seldom a fact, or choosing to live in the most miserable conditions affecting adversely their health, particularly of children and women.

- Under RAY this aspect of recognition of vast numbers of people living in slums and pavements and their integration with the cities development plans and programs has to be better defined. is not very well defined. Policies such as cut-off-dates for redevelopment and rehabilitation eligibility, as in Maharashtra must be repealed, instead area based priority or phasing in undertaking development programmes be initiated as a way to dealing with the vast scale and members of slum-dwellers/slums.

All slums must be declared protected from evictions and demolitions until comprehensive development plans and projects are implemented. New slums must also be simultaneously prevented and construction with the availability of affordable housing on ownership and or rental basis. Evictions of slums from untenable sites (untenable elaborated) would be carried out only upon rehabilitation plans are prepared and projects implemented. Similarly in-situ redevelopment is carried out after 70% consent of slum dwellers is attained, after public discussion of the plans and proposals and on effective participatory mechanism (elaborate).

Free housing should not be a part of the redevelopment or rehab programme. Slum dwellers must financially contribute sum & basis (elaborate) to the project. This will reinforce their sense of participation and ownership, necessary for successful and sustainable redevelopments and rehabilitation projects and programmes.

Slums Survey and Mapping:

Survey and mapping of all the settlements of the poor in our cities, on as is where is basis irrespective of the place, location, type of structures, land status, conditions of living etc., is necessary without prejudice.

- It must be understood that Survey and mapping is an important socio-political act. Mechanisms for participation of the slum dwellers and the neighborhood people must be integral to this process. Democratization of survey and mapping is a necessary condition for the implementation of a honest and effective recognition policy as well, a necessary precondition for initiating sum-free cities programs and projects. This covers matters relating to both, social as well as physical data. Boundaries of slums, land status, tenability, number of houses or families size and such other issues are best established by including the knowledge that the people possess.

Surveys and mapping of slums must then be reviewed in conjunction with the city's geography and development plans and programmes analyzed thereafter and not in isolation. The integration of slums and slum dwellers being the key objective of building equal and 'slum-free' cities.

City Development Plan's and Land-Use:

Allocation of land for EWS and LIG affordable housing is fundamental to the successful implementation of slums redevelopment and rehabilitation programs and projects. We must remember here that in most cities housing is un-affordable even to the middle class, particularly to the lower middle class. The issue here is not only about incomes as the basis of classification of our cities population, but the un-real, un-controlled and speculative real estate prices that marginalizes vast majorities of people, particularly, evident in big cities. Therefore the people living in slums also includes the middle class- professionals, academics etc.

A critical review of the land-use plans of our cities is required in-order to re-designate land-use and allocate land in proportion to the population of various income groups – HIG, MIG, LIG & EWS.

Till date almost all the slums redevelopment schemes have dealt with slums on individual basis, detached from their neighborhoods and the city. Tragically the housing question too has been reduced to simplistic solutions with overwhelming thrust on a game of numbers. How more and more units can be squeezed into the slums land without any consideration for basic services and social amenities, leave aside open spaces vital for high density housing models, is often the merit of the projects under implementation. Again the example of Mumbai's SRA policy is noteworthy, for wrong reasons. The scheme has facilitated the developers, both private and government, to house the existing slum dwellers onto as small as 15% to 20% of the slums land that they occupy thus, leading to phenomenally high densities and high-rise buildings.

Comprehensive Planning:

Redevelopment and rehabilitation projects must be planned on town planning norms for the provision of various social amenities, schools, health-care center's, recreational facility, particularly for children, and open spaces. Simultaneously density and related FSI or FAR fixed, to enable planned redevelopment necessary for the achievement of slum-free cities. Slums redevelopment projects in Mumbai under the present scheme of the state government is leading to further slummification of our city, with serious consequences for now and the future.

Integration of the slum areas with the city is important too. Affordable public transportation, roads connectivity, setting up of municipal markets in the slum redevelopment project areas or in the immediate neighborhood, solid-waste collection and management services extended to the slum areas, adequate storm water and sewage networks connected to the cities grid, supply of safe and adequate drinking water as per common norms, etc., are significant aspects of slum-free cities.

Ward/Area Based Planning priority:

Local area and or ward based planning for slums redevelopment and rehabilitation is a positive step towards minimizing the severities of displacement and dis-location from familiar places and social networks. Also, by this planning approach, we could facilitate integrated slums redevelopment plans with the neighborhood as well as with other slums in the area. Cities and towns that do not have well developed Development Plans must use this opportunity for addressing slums issues to plan for effective slum-free neighborhoods and city.

Land for Affordable Housing:

Its not new to say that un-availability of land is at the root of the housing crisis in our cities. But adequate and effective land and development policies have not been pursued in-order to facilitate the eradication of slums and slum like conditions in which millions in our cities live. Instead we have diverted our attention to dubious development schemes to appease the homeless and engineered the most outrageous and oppressive building standards to house the poor particularly, in slums redevelopment and rehabilitation projects.

In cities like Mumbai, it is necessary to amend the development plans of the city, to reserve lands occupied by slums as sites for affordable mass housing, that includes in-situ slums redevelopment. Besides this, in whichever city its possible, additional land must be earmarked in the development plan for affordable housing in proportion to the immediate demand and for the future needs.

Reservation of a certain percentage of building areas of MIG and HIG housing in all cities must be reserved for EWS. But, this cannot be the only way to addressing the critical housing shortage conditions. We have experienced gross abuse and misuse of such formulas in the implementation of housing projects under the ULCRA. Apartments were amalgated and sold to MIG and HIG people thus, blatantly undermining the central purpose. In any case by this method alone the deficit in housing cannot be met.

In the case of slums redevelopment projects, the existing slum dwellers may be re-housed, in big cities like Mumbai, in 50% of the occupied land but with cap on density and FSI/FAR, and the other 50% land utilized for building affordable housing stock for the present and future demands. In smaller towns, where multistoried buildings are not necessary for compensating land values, slums may be redeveloped guided by other mechanisms including, self-help models with individual buildings along with high density planning for optimum utilization of land.

Affordable Housing Stock:

For achieving slum-less cities we have to not only prepare plans for existing slums redevelopment and rehabilitation but also with equal priority plan for building mass affordable housing in our cities for immediate additional demands now and the future. Otherwise slums will continue to proliferate in our cities and we would be forever engaged with fire fighting. Historical experiences of the growth pattern and demographic character of the particular city, along with its future economic and growth planning, be evaluated in-order to evolve future demand projections.

In case private agencies including, builders and developers, undertake this responsibility of re-building the slums along with the additional affordable housing stock construction with their investments, then the profits and management of sales and rental housing, whose proportions may be decided in the policy, may be left to them to manage. In this manner private financiers and developers participation in the promotion of affordable housing development and building slum-free cities objective may be partially fulfilled.

Increased Government Role:

Implementation and Governance: State and City based Committees, Architects and PMC Panels.

As the government takes on active role in the implementation of various poverty alleviation programs including the slum-free objective for our cities, it will be necessary for the concerned government agencies to constitute architects and project management consultants panels. The various redevelopment and rehabilitation projects could then be assigned to the panelists for undertaking professional roles and provide services along with close interaction and participation of the affected people. Democratization of planning and architecture is necessary for evolving and successfully implementing the various projects. Concerned government agencies would pay the professional fees and charges of the consultants and be the principle implementation agency. This approach is opposite of the present modalities where-in private developers are simply handed over the turnkey responsibility and the concerned government agency then facilitating the private interest. After the panelists have prepared plans and designs, the government agency invites bids from contractors, not builders-developers. Governments, local municipalities and other governmental agencies like housing boards etc., along central assistance mobilise funds for the project. Similarly, they also undertake the construction of additional affordable housing stock built for sales and for rentals.

Private Land and Finance issues:

We have to address this issue particularly since large proportions of land in cities, are privately owned, including slums occupied lands. They cannot be ignored nor completely bypassed unless strict land acquisition laws are implemented and or land is nationalized. Similarly tapping private finance for various social development projects including, mass affordable housing is necessary for enhancing housing finance. But the investments and the development rights of land occupied by slums be restricted in the re-development projects to re-housing of the existing slum-dwellers and the surplus area as permissible under the FAR /FSI norms and development plans of the city for construction of affordable apartments / houses having areas limited to 300 – 700 sq. feet.

Simultaneously there are other mechanisms and incentives including, tax rebates, bonds, etc. for increasing housing finance and promotion of affordable housing in the country.