

Southern Economist Vol. 51 No. 19 February 2013

51st Year of Publication

Urban Slums in India: Problems and Challenges

By R. Karthikeyan and S. Dharmaraj*

Urbanisation is a key indicator of economic development and should be seen as a positive factor for overall development. And also, as an economy grows its towns and cities expand in size and volume and the contribution of the urban sector to the national economy increases. It also creates a number of problems and challenges. The urban centres are characterised by an inter-play of multilevel socio-political and economic forces which cumulatively have added complexity to city life. And, this complexity poses enormous challenges to the administrative system involved in managing regulatory as well as development affairs in urban areas. The population migrates from the villages towards the town and the city in India.

The fundamental values of Indian society and civilization are preserved in villages where from they are transmitted to towns and cities. Over a period of time, rural societies undergo a variety of changes. Some start resembling urban societies in certain factors and identify themselves as villages, while others remain less affected by the forces emerging from cities. Urban India is descending into facing a lack of water and sanitation, slums growing, affordable housing, clean air, road, public transport, and lives without access to basic amenities.

* Dr. R. Karthikeyan, Asso. Professor and Mr. S. Dharmaraj, Ph.D Research Scholar, both are from Dept. of Economics, A.V.C. College (Autonomous), Marimpenai, Mayiladuthurai.

February 1, 2013

Today, city is facing enormous problems and challenges. There is a growing concern about how to make our cities safe and sustainable. The cities which make vital contributions in the social and economic development are struggling with serious challenges such as environmental pollution, congestion.

The majority of slum dwellers identify themselves with the city rather than with their native place and plan to settle permanently in the city. In spite of poor conditions in slums, second generation residents who are not nostalgic about their rural background feel that life in slum is reasonably tolerable and city life is probably better than rural life. Problem of the slum can be dealt by initiatives taken by the government. NGOs public co-operation and employers. Some of the possible solution can be such as local authorities and national governments should collaborate with the organization of the urban poor in upgrading slums and providing alternatives to slum formation.

Increasing incidence of urban poverty, inadequate access to shelter and basic services, increasing inequality in income levels resulting in the proliferation of slums and squatter settlements with overall deterioration in quality of life.

Slums are housing clusters having insufficient facilities of hygiene, toilet, drinking water, sanitation etc. According to the report of the United Nations Habitat, "Slums has been defined as a building, group of buildings or area characterised by over-crowding, deterioration, insanitary conditions or absence of facilities or amenities which because of these conditions or any of them, endanger the health safety or morals of its inhabitants of the community" (United Nation Habitat Report-2001).

Urbanisation has been considered as an index of development but in case of developing countries like India, urbanisation is not the outcome of merely the growth potential generated by urban settlements. It has been largely due to people work relationship in rural areas, in which land is the essential medium and which is right now so critically balanced that even small addition to population is pushing people out of agriculture to non-agricultural occupation. Thus, most of these settlements suffer from improper and haphazard development, absence of basic infrastructure and services, uncontrolled and unchecked growth of slums, lack of housing, high degree of visual and uncontrolled traffic.

Problems of Urban Slums

The growing urbanization and industrialization are the challenges facing our cities. Although the government has undertaken several initiatives to solve various problems,

the challenges are immense. It is not only through government policies and actions, but also through the committed actions and initiatives of the community and individuals, that the problems of our cities can be resolved and our cities will become clean and green havens. Urban slums are a very visible reality in India. A number of middle class localities in a major cities have slums in surrounding areas.

A rapid increase in urban population results in the problems of straining or breaking down of sanitary and other infrastructure facilities in cities and towns. The local bodies are given the responsibility of providing amenities with limited or often scant resources. The net result of this incongruity is between the resources and responsibilities. This not only leads to formation of new slums but also give new dimensions to the problem of slums.

Slums are a formidable problem merely because the gap between resource and demand for shelter tend to exist perpetually. The urban poor by themselves can neither afford to build pucca house or spare the hard earned money to live in rented houses with basic amenities. Such people enroach government and private lands kept vacant. Many slums are situated in vulnerable locations like river margins, water logged areas, road margins, etc. The slum population prefers to live in unhygienic conditions and in areas prone to floods and accidents.

The slum population in 2001 was 61.82 million of which the reported slum population in the 640 towns and cities having population of 50,000 and above is 42.58 million. The total urban population of these 640 towns is 184.35 million. The 640 towns spread over 26 states have

reported existence of slums. The spread of slums 42.6million people consisting of 12.7 million households reside in slum of these towns. It is a coincidence that both census of India in 2001 and NSSO in 2002 found that every seventh person urban India is a slum dweller(Slum Population Census of India-2001)

Slums and urban squat will be a diminishing phenomenon, if the rapid economic progress keeps its pace. Today, we would have smaller of the slums, had our economic policies of the present were in place 50 years back. Only now, all signs point to a rapidly rising GDP together with rising per capita GDP. With rise in income level, tendency to migrate to the slums has lessened. Die-hard slum dwellers who wish to pay no taxes and spend nothing on housing will most certainly continue to stay there.

As India progresses on the path of development, and is slated to be the next superpower, the contribution of the inhabitants of slums to the economy is underestimated by most, and as a community, they are often labeled as a nuisance to the society. The living conditions of slum dwellers are usually pathetic and there is a lack of basic amenities. In a survey conducted by the National Sample Survey Organization in 2002, only 15 per cent of urban slum dwellers had access to drinking water, toilets and electricity for lighting. Drinking water is also more of a luxury in many cases, and the water is foul tasting and untreated. Crime and gang wars are common, as people from diverse backgrounds are compelled to live together, and share resources which are in short supply to begin with. Since a majority of slum dwellers are migrants, there is a certain prevalence of illiteracy and lack of knowledge about the complexities of city life.

For the development of cities, for instance the building of malls, multi-storied and residential complexes targeted at the urban rich, slum dwellers are often shifted from one area to the next, and efforts to secure permanent housing are a failure in most cases. Majority of slum dwellers do not possess ration cards, or voter identity cards. Hence they cannot even be categorized as citizens of the country.

Our slums are indeed very dingy, dark and dismal. But the dark clouds are now fading. Despite the efforts of political and slum mafia to keep slum dwellers to remain docile, there are definite signs of younger slum dwellers to improve the quality of their lives. People, who migrated to the cities and found work, brought their cousins and rest of the families to the cities. More slums developed as more population moved to the cities. By mid 2010s Mumbai, Kolkata, Delhi, and all other large cities were dotted with slums. Recent years have been a dramatic growth in the number of slums as urban populations have increased in the Third World. According to recent United Nation Habitat Report, 227 million people live in slum in commonwealth countries almost one in six commonwealth citizens in a quarter of commonwealth countries (11 African, 2 Asian and 1 Pacific), more than two out of three urban dwellers live in slums, and many of these countries are urbanizing rapidly. People residing in slums face many problems like improper sanitation, unhygienic environmental conditions, social, economic, health, educational and cultural problems and many more.

Workers without adequate residential facilities try to make some temporary arrangements near the place of their work, i.e. creates the urban slums in India, which leads to the absence of adequate housing

24

February 1, 2013

Written by Administrator

Friday, 01 February 2013 00:00 -

51st Year of Publication

facilities in the urban areas. People who continue to remain in slums could easily live in better areas in their native villages but they prefer to rent out their own well built houses and live in slums, because they want to do have better livelihood. They have completely adjusted with the slums environment and they would find life difficult if they are made to shift away from the slums. The Union Government Ministry is finalizing a draft National Slum Policy to deal with one of the most serious socio economic problems threatening urban growth and the slums basic.

Challenges of Slum Improvement

Slums are cancerous growth for urban life and no effort should be spared to eradicate them. No doubt, they are manifestation of socio economic conditions prevailing in the country but if no effort is paid to contain them, then urban life will become not only miserable but unbearable. The Government of India has introduced a special central assistance to states for up gradation of slums with the formulation of schemes. These schemes should be applicable to all the States and UTs having urban population, and funds are allotted to States on the basis of urban slum population.

The city authorities undertake a sort of fire fighting salvage operation from time to time incurring large expenditure. This cost is estimated to be many times more than the cost involved in accommodating them. This needs proper planning by reserving pre-planned land for this growth of population. The growth of slum population in these growing cities is so prolific that, our local governments have lost control of the deteriorating urban decay. In other words, the government organisations have generally found themselves largely ineffective to forge authentic partnership with the urban slum people in solving habitat related issues.

Strategies Adopted for Slum Improvement and Rehabilitation:

The slum located in congested un-hygienic areas of the urban areas wherein equitable distribution of space is not feasible are cleared and tenemental schemes put up. 1. Such slums shall be identified and taken up for providing basic facilities to make the areas habitable; and 2. Whenever neither tenemental scheme nor in suit development is feasible resettlement of the slum families in tenements in nearby locations (Mankam-2005).

Schemes for Improving the Quality of Slums in Urban Areas

Many numbers of schemes were announced for improving the quality of slums in urban areas. The 11th finance commission makes provision for following.

1. Slum clearance scheme, 2. Constituency Development Fund including MPAs and MLAs, 3. Slum Area Development Programme, 4. Urban Renewal Scheme, 5. Survey of Slums in Urban Areas, 6. Rainwater Harvesting Scheme, and 7. Slum Improvement Works, 8. Vastukli Ambedkar Housing Programme - construction of individual houses, 9. Vastukli Shelter Upgradation Programme, 10. Rainwater and Renewals to the Slum Tenements, Vastukli Shelter Upgradation Programme (11th 5-Year Plan-2007-12).

Measures for Integrated Slum Development

The measures that are required to be pursued and strengthened further for integrated slum development are:

- Creating and Updating Database on Slums,
- Citywide perspective and Integrated Slum Development Plans,
- Augmenting and facilitating access to service for slum dwellers,
- Gradation and resettlement options for slum improvement,
- Using land as a resource for housing and shelter development for slum dwellers, and
- Granting tenure security to slum dwellers.

To promote integrated city development and to enable the

people living in slums to gain access to basic services. A number of schemes and programmes have been launched from time to time. For example environmental improvement of urban slums, National Slum Development (NSD), Integrated Low Cost Sanitation Scheme (ILCSS), etc. (11th Five Year Plan-2007-12).

Conclusion

The majority of slum dwellers identify themselves with the city rather than with their native place and plan to settle permanently in the city. In spite of poor conditions in slums, second generation residents who are not nostalgic about their rural background feel that life in slum is reasonably tolerable and city life is probably better than rural life. Problem of the slum can be dealt by initiatives taken by the government, NGOs public co-operation and employers. Some of the possible solution can be such as local authorities and national governments should collaborate with the organization of the urban poor in upgrading slums and providing alternatives to slum formation. In recent years, there has been a growing awareness and concern about the deteriorating qualities of life in the metropolitan cities in India. Public cooperation was a prerequisite to improve the quality of life and living condition. There was an urgent need to launch a programme of mass education and to create public awareness for environmental protection. It was believed that the adoption of above strategy will help to achieve improvement in the quality of life and living conditions in the urban slum areas.

References

1. Gopal S.N and S.S.Dhuliel (2000), "Urban Development and Management", Deep & Deep Publications, New Delhi.
2. Gunumathi.K.T (2000), "Slum Related Policies and Programmes", Vol.III, No.2, April/PP-57-58.
3. National Sample Survey Organisation (1994-2002).
5. Rajabul-Nasima, "Slum Improvement Policies in India-Some Issues", Delhi Vikas Pata, PP-35-37. □