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Hearing held for slum dwellers

Staff Reporter

Lack of rehabilitation of many families highlighted by participants

CHENNAI: To address some of the issues faced by the urban poor in light of the displacement and resultant relocation of a large number of slum dwellers to make way for infrastructure projects, a public hearing was organised by the Chennai Slum Dwellers Rights Movement here on Wednesday.

Environmentalists, non-governmental organisations, trade union representatives, displaced slum dwellers and the communities which are to be affected participated in the meeting.

D.Poovizhi, resident of L.G. Road in Pudupet, who has been living on the platform for the past three months, complained: "There was no notice about our eviction and the Slum Clearance Board officials exploited our illiteracy by making us sign forms which were later produced as proof of consent."

She alleged that the authorities were demanding a bribe of Rs.10,000 for allotting a house at the alternative site. This, she added, was one of the reasons why she has been living on the pavement.

Referring to the lack of rehabilitation of many families evicted for desilting work carried out in the Cooum River in 1997, A.Gnaneswaran, a resident of Mylapore, said: "Promise of rehabilitation is just a sham. Intimidation tactics are used by the government against the poor and the police regularly used to threaten us."

A.K.Ravichandran, a resident of Aminjikarai, said the elevated expressway from Chennai Port to Maduravoyal had eight bends just so that shopping malls and other commercial establishments could be saved.

"An expressway is meant to be a straight road. High rises are always left alone. Aren't hut and tenement dwellers equal citizens too?" he asked.

The hearing was chaired by former Judge of Kerala High Court T.V.Ramakrishnan and retired IAS officer M.G.Devasahayam.