

Slum Rehabilitation and the Rebound Phenomenon

By Anushree Jonko

The United Nations Human Settlement Program estimated that India and China have the highest number of slum population in 2012 and that it was only going to increase in the following decade due to the high urbanisation trend owing to the countries' developing nature.

The reason behind India's mushrooming slum population can be credited to India's torpid manufacturing industry which holds off urbanisation in abeyance but also gives way for the growth of small-scale and informal sectors which in turn attracts "low-wage and low-skilled" workforce from rural areas.

Slum rehabilitation involves shifting informal environments to a housing structure that is more formal. Sounds good, but there are issues that heavily plague it. The proliferation of urban slums in India is due to the rapid growth of urbanisation but despite rehabilitation and removal of these urban slums, the sprawling of slums continue to increase and a rebound phenomenon is observed. The efficiency of slum rehabilitation is still thoroughly contested.

The Slum Rehabilitation Authority - a state agency is responsible for the rehabilitation of slums and for approving the redevelopment plans of the developer. However, the standard of the rehabilitated buildings are as poor as the slums and are commonly referred to as "vertical slums". There are a lot of reasons why the occupants are forced to leave these buildings and move back to their "horizontal slums". The poor quality of the rehabilitated housing, the higher cost of living, the distance from their new housing to their children's education centres (since most of the rehabilitated building are structured at the city's outskirts, the distance when it comes to their workplace from their new houses, low comfort levels as compared to their previous living places, indoor health quality, a sense of community, lack of common private spaces, the restricted air quality inside the housing complexes, lack of sunlight and the most important - social isolation (as developers complain that the urban population is unwilling to purchase property near the rehabilitated housing complexes.)

The four aspects which are grossly affected by slum life are education, health, labour and women. Slum rehabilitation can only be a success when there is a marked improvement in the abovementioned parameters. If there is no change or deterioration in these parameters, then slum rehabilitation is as good as calling the process beautification of the city or formalising the housing structures.

However, there are ways to tackle the issues of slum rehabilitation in India. First, rehabilitation should be a back-up approach and an in-situ upgrading approach should be taken rather than a rehabilitation process which includes forced evictions. Second, the issue which is hardly addressed when it comes to slum-rehabilitation - mindsets. When the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) made an announcement to offer vacant homes at Rohini to slum-dwellers under a scheme, the residents threatened to move to court. Employment is another important factor when it comes to rehabilitation. The resettled areas should have employment opportunities similar to the ones that had the rehabilitated population thriving in their old areas.

The "slum" population is an important part of society. It constitutes a major part of the workforce, are as entitled to decent living spaces and others and the idea of only providing "basic amenities" to the slum dwellers should be addressed to. Basic amenities are not the only goals the SRA should be looking into. Therefore the Us and Them notion should be eradicated before taking steps for the slum dwellers.