



India's Failure To Address Its Urban Slum Problem

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(The editorial is based on the article “India’s failure to address its urban slum problem” which appeared in Livemint on 23rd October 2018. It analyses the problem of hidden hunger in India.)

What are Slums?

- Slums are illegal urban settlements on public land and usually grow over a period of time in a constant and irregular manner. Despite this fact, slums are considered as an integral part of urbanization and as a manifestation of the overall socioeconomic policies and planning in the urban sector. The existence and rapid growth of slums have been noted as a general urban phenomena common prevalent throughout the globe.
- According to the United Nations agency UN-HABITAT, a slum is a run-down area of a city characterized by substandard housing and poverty and lacking in tenure security. According to the United Nations, the proportion of urban dwellers living in slums decreased from 47 percent to 37 percent in the developing world between 1990 and 2005. However, due to rising population, the number of slum dwellers is rising day by day.
- Slums may also be described as “a chaotically occupied, unsystematically developed and generally neglected area, which is overpopulated by persons and overcrowded with ill-repaired and neglected structures” (Indian Conference, 1957). They have emerged out of the urban development process and are unplanned, unintended settlements ignored in the whole process of urban development.

- Asia's largest slum, **Dharavi**, lies on prime property right in the middle of Mumbai (Neza, in Mexico, is the world's largest slum).
- Half-a-million people or so, live in the 230 hectares that is Dharavi.
- It was founded in 1882 at the time of British Raj. During the 18th century, unplanned localities started to grow when the process of urbanization of Mumbai was going on.
- Recently, the Maharashtra government signed an initiative: A special purpose vehicle with 80% private and 20% government stake to redevelop Dharavi as a whole rather than in separate sub-clusters as previously envisioned.

Reasons for growing slums

- Population explosion and poverty force the urban poor to live in slums and that leads to an increase in the size of slums. Also, a regional imbalance in development creates rural to urban migration, thus increasing the overall urban population density which pressurizes the urban poor to move into slums.
- In the past 15 years, India's urban population density has increased by 45%. It is further estimated that 40% of the population will live in urban areas by 2026. With increasingly densified urban population, there exists a huge demand for land. This shortage of land forces the urban poor to live in increasingly dense communities creating slums in the process.
- Rising material costs and labor costs resulting from labor shortage is another reason for the growth of slums as it makes developers unable to deliver affordable housing to the market.
- Also, delayed procedures for land development forces people to stay in congested areas which further leads to creation of slums.
- A lack of efficiency of urban local bodies coupled with unplanned city management is also one of the major reasons for creation of slum areas.

- Moreover, social backwardness forces people to live in congested areas away from main areas. For example, more Scheduled Castes (SCs) live in slums - with one out of every five residents belonging to the SC category.
- A lack of political will for developing slums can also be seen, as slums provide cheap and steady labour (party-workers) to political parties.

Issues arising from neglecting slum development

- Slums act as a magnet for the rural poor by attracting them towards city life. This it does by partially blinding them from the hardships that accompany life in the city.
- People living in slum areas are also prone to suffer from waterborne diseases such as typhoid and cholera, as well as from more fatal ones like cancer and HIV/AIDS.
- Also, women and children living in slums are prone to become victims of social evils like prostitution, beggary and child trafficking. Slum dwellers in general and regardless of gender, often become victims of such social evils.
- Slum areas are also commonly believed to be places that generate a high incidence of crime. This is due to official neglect towards education, law and order, and government services in slum areas.
- Then, the majority of slum dwellers in a developing country earn their living from the informal sector which neither provides them with financial security nor with enough earnings for a decent living, keeping them firmly within the vicious cycle of poverty.
- Lastly, hunger, malnourishment, lack of quality education, high infant mortality, child marriage, child labour are some of the other social problems prevalent in slums.

Way Forward

- Poverty is the most significant reason behind the creation of slums. So, the issue of poverty must be addressed first by policymakers.
- There is also a need for future policies to support the livelihoods of the urban poor by enabling urban informal-sector activities to flourish and develop. Slum policies should be integrated within broader, people-focused urban poverty reduction policies that address the various dimensions of poverty.
- Easy geographical access to jobs through pro-poor transport should also be created.
- Adequate data should be gathered by conducting various studies before the formulation of any policy.
- There is also a need for investment in citywide infrastructure as a pre-condition for successful and affordable slum upgrading, which could also act as one strong mechanism for reversing the socio-economic exclusion of slum dwellers.
- Steps should be taken such that a higher and more stable income be made accessible to slum dwellers through their employment in productive jobs. This is because employment opportunities in urban centres that pay well has the potential to generate a healthy and sustainable lifestyle in the slums.
- Lastly, slums should be developed because developing slums also trigger local economic development, improve urban mobility and connectivity, and integrate the slums, which are enormous economically productive spheres, into the physical and socioeconomic fabric of the wider city.

To improve urban infrastructure, the Government has taken various steps:

- Smart City Mission (to create smart cities) to focus on basic amenities, education, health services, IT accessibility, digitization, e-governance, sustainable development, safety, and security.
- Housing for all by 2022 for constructing houses for slum dwellers under the slum-rehabilitation scheme and providing loans at subsidized rates for the economically weaker sections.
- AMRUT: Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation to build a gap between infrastructural necessity and their accessibility.
- HRIDAY: National Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana to preserve and holistically develop the heritage cities of India.
- Swachh Bharat Mission for improving cleanliness and sanitation.

Slum development projects across the world:

- **Slum Improvement Program, Dhaka, Bangladesh:** The Slum Improvement Programme accomplished a major breakthrough in providing a basic physical infrastructure system to the urban poor.
- **Quetta Katchi Abadis Environment Management Programme in Karachi** showed how community-based sanitation management in informal settlements can be successful.
- **Kenya Slum Upgrading Programme:** Implementation Strategy of this project outlines several programmatic principles and values such as decentralization, sustainability, democratization and empowerment, transparency and accountability, resource mobilization, secure tenure, expansion and upscaling, and partnerships and networks.
- **Integrated Approach to Reducing Poverty Mukuru Slum, Nairobi, Kenya:** project was launched, with the aim of improving services in three Mukuru slums; Donholm, Centre, and Riverside which have a combined population of 67,000. They chose a particular slum pocket which was found to be vulnerable in access to sanitation and water supply facilities.
- **Madhya Pradesh Urban Services for the Poor:** has been initiated by DFID (The Department for International Development (DFID) India, with its headquarters in New Delhi, is part of the British High Commission family. It implements DFID's largest single overseas programme contributing to poverty eradication) in partnership with the Government of Madhya Pradesh (GoMP) for infrastructure development, slum development, and poverty reduction.
- **Mahila Milan-** A Case of Suryodaya Housing Society, Pune, Maharashtra: it has brought together 3500 women across the Pune city slums. Mahila Milan was initiated to empower women through Bachat Gats (SHGs). It works in 56 slum settlements of Pune with thrift and credit activity.
- In situ rehabilitation of around 2800 families of **Kathputli colony in Delhi** is underway.