



Housing Poverty in Rural Areas

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This article is based on **“Minimising the housing divide”** which was published on 03/01/2020 in The Hindu. It talks about the prevalence of Housing Poverty in rural areas.

The right to adequate housing is recognised as a basic human right by the United Nations and its constituent bodies. Although India is a signatory to many international covenants in this regard, but the realisation of the right to adequate housing to all has remained an elusive dream.

Major neglect of adequate housing is more prominent in rural areas, where not only the physical infrastructure but also social infrastructure such as education and health have remained ignored.

- Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services".
- Right of Life under Article 21 of the Indian constitution also encompasses the right to shelter.

Though **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana** has been launched in pursuance of providing adequate housing, however, interventions like these have hardly worked in minimising urban-rural divides. **This can be depicted by:**

- The incidence of **housing-related poverty** is in the order of 25.85 million (82% in rural areas and 18% in urban).
- **Menial occupation workers** and low-income earners have been facing these forms of poverty the most.

- **Dilapidated units** have contributed towards a high level of housing amenities deprivation, especially because such housing units cannot safely be connected with electricity or solar energy, latrines, and drinking water, owing to associated structural risks.

This scenario has resulted in multiple deprivations of 45% of rural families without electricity, biogas and LPG; over 69% without household latrines; and over 82% of families without treated water for drinking at household levels.

- Due to this, there have been **higher rates of internal migration** both due to dissatisfaction with housing arrangements and the prospect of better housing elsewhere.

Reasons for housing poverty in rural areas

- **Shortages in the supply of housing** and a lack of policy redevelopment of collapsible or dilapidated units, millions of Indians dwell in unsecured housing.
- **Lack of public funds** during the early planning era has compelled the policymakers to adopt the overarching philosophy of the growth pole theory, with the hope that the benefit of the urban-centric development will percolate into rural hinterland progressively.
- **Due to poverty** and lack of access to any formal sources of finance, the rural poor are rendered incapable of constructing safe, sustainable and livable houses.
- Housing in rural areas is one sector that has consistently suffered from the **lack of meaningful market interventions**, including the supply of developed land and financing for housing.
- Amidst the whole rural housing crisis, the ones who have been hit the most are the marginalized sections such as the SCs and STs who are at a clear disadvantage in terms of housing conditions and amenities when compared to other social categories.

Way Forward

- If India is to have a real chance to minimise the housing development divide, it requires an **integrated housing development strategy** for the rural areas. This has to be implemented in **“mission mode”**.
- There must be **accountability** in terms of implementing such a mission agenda on a continuous basis, with social audits at multiple levels of governance.
- **Realistic resource allocation** is required given the cost of redevelopment and new housing units besides other development costs of drinking water supply, household latrines, energy, and drainage connectivity.
- **Penetration of the market**, including the cooperative sector for the supply of critical inputs such as land and finances, is the need of the hour.

- **Public-private-partnership projects** should be encouraged on public or government-owned lands, with fiscal and other incentives. Landowners should be encouraged to develop incentive-based affordable housing projects.

Former President APJ Abdul Kalam had proposed the concept of **Provision of Urban Amenities to Rural Areas (PURA)** whose objective goes beyond the mere creation of economic infrastructure and employment opportunities in rural areas. To further this paradigm, access to good housing, including housing amenities, should become a priority.

Drishti Mains Question

The right to adequate housing is recognised as a basic human right but the realisation of this has remained an elusive dream, especially in rural areas. Discuss.