

Urban Housing for the Poor still a Contested Right: Case Reflections from Mumbai

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Abstract

It appears though surprisingly that on average, in Mumbai, a squatter will be relocated at least twenty times in his lifetime. especially in Mumbai, this means that Each time, the squatter needs to move out with his family and all his belongings. In some cases, this relocation entails slum redevelopment; in others, it involves invoking violence through court orders and evicting residents in the interests of large corporations or large-scale development projects. The right to housing seems a distant privilege under the Indian constitution. This study discusses the ongoing sagas of tenancy rights in urban India. Case studies of urban settlements that have run into difficulties with Slum Rehabilitation Authorities (SRAs), particularly movements led by housing associations, their struggles, and impediments amidst some successful outcomes. Our findings reveal that more work is required by SRAs, and public and private partnerships in Mumbai to counterbalance the removals and demolitions. Methodologically, the study is set in the tradition of interpretivist social construction. The authors also present a reflective analysis of a social worker's role in the slums. The study argues that the poor will have a 'fair go' only when symptoms that prevent the poor in difficult social circum.

Keywords: Urban Slums; Mumbai Slums; Slum Rehabilitation Authorities; Housing for the Poor; Awas Yojana 2015; India

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Introduction

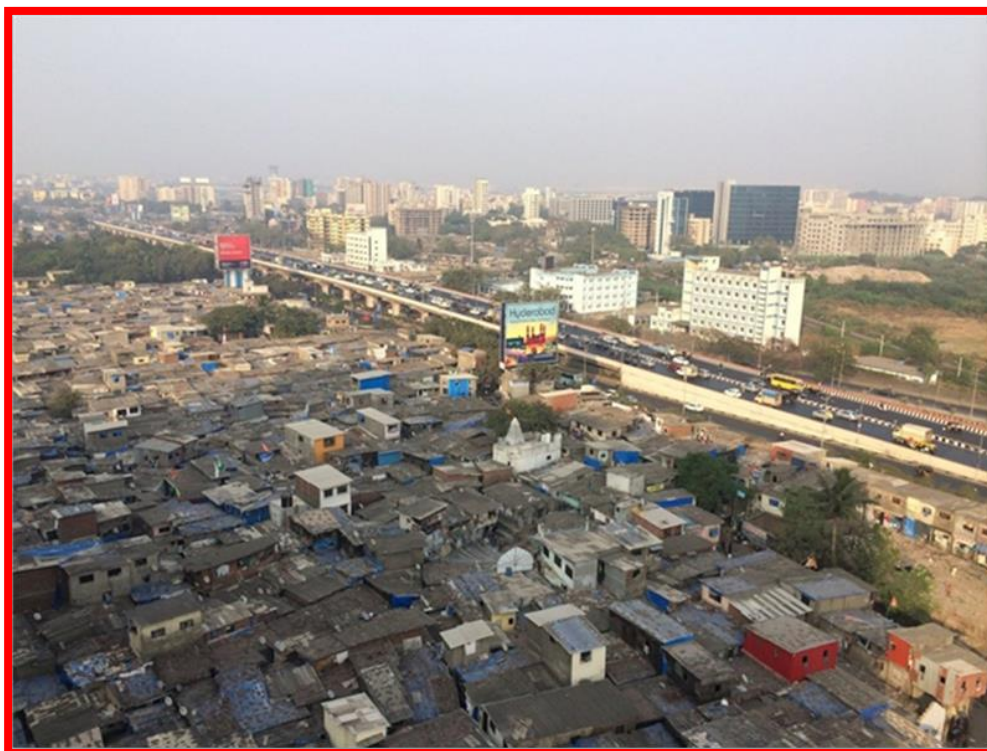


Figure 1: A photo to drive home the division of contrasting Habitats
Source: Dr Yue Zhang

Globally, urban areas are home to half of the world's population and generate 80 per cent of the global gross domestic product. In developing countries, this economic reality, combined with a high proportion of informal and casualised employment, is a significant source of poverty and housing insecurity, particularly among the poor (Bolay, 2020). Urban planning was created to bring order to rapidly expanding urban areas. Still, cities in India that have experienced rapid population growth often lack the financial and human resources necessary to address social issues on time. In recent years, the idea that cities are a machine designed to produce poverty and social inequalities has gained traction, particularly as poverty rates and the number of poor people continue to rise. Moreover, dwindling rural occupations and limited small farming and labour opportunities in rural India are also making migrants seek work and a better life in cities (Pulla and Khan, 2016). In the following section, we will be presenting an overview of the country's housing crisis and policy critique on its critical impacts in a city like Mumbai.

India's Housing Crisis for the Poor

In this decade, the Indian economy had been one of the fastest-growing in the world, but it appears that its impacts on the urban poor are still to be desired. The New Economic Strategy, patterned after neoliberal theory, was expected to reduce poverty by increasing economic growth and employment. There is a significant amount of economic disparity, insecurity, unemployment and underemployment, and labour exploitation within the country (Bhattacharyya et al., 2020; Das, 2015; Shah and Lerche, 2020). Data from the Ministry of Housing, Government of India, acknowledges that millions of poor exist in unliveable, temporary, overcrowded, and dilapidated housing conditions across the length and breadth of the country. In those circumstances, the United Nations' minimum standards for work and facilities, adequate accommodation, and adequate access to water and sanitation to be provided at a reasonable cost, becomes a nightmare for the State and the urban bodies (D'Souza, 2019; Rao et al., 2022). Several

variables that constitute even a minimalist definition of dwelling, such as lighting, ventilation, basic infrastructure, are absent. People's physical and mental health, including their mental health and ability to access and participate in social activities at work, can be negatively impacted by inadequate housing (D'Souza, 2019; Mahabir et al., 2016; Zhang, 2016; see also, Pulla and Khan, 2016). Even though various housing regimes have attempted to improve the housing situation, the result has been a failure that has left millions of people in India without adequate housing; they live in temporary, overcrowded, and dilapidated housing or are homeless (D'Souza, 2019; Rao et al., 2022).

While all residents are at risk if they reside in unhealthy housing, it is more probable that low-income people and vulnerable groups live in inappropriate or insecure housing or are more likely to be denied housing rights. In addition, crowded housing raises the risk of exposure to infectious diseases; it adds to this shortage of water supply and sanitation facilities that jeopardize food safety and personal hygiene (WHO, 2018).

The Unaffordable Commodity is Housing

Housing has been reduced to the status of a commodity, resulting in it becoming unaffordable and inaccessible to most of the poor in metropolitan areas. Additionally, informal settlements are formed due to unaffordability with residents having either no or insufficient access to or supplies of basic amenities like water, electricity, sanitation, and other related facilities necessary for living a dignified life. The second author has generated several critical options for Slum Rehabilitation Authorities (SRAs) to use in order to alleviate the housing situation (Khan, 2020; Khan and Gupta, 2017) of the urban poor in their previous work since this involvement in community action in relation to Golibar settlement since 2016. Many agencies in Mumbai, including the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM), the

Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA), the Railways, and the Forest departments, are demolishing slums at an alarming rate; many of these demolitions are carried out without permission, and most of them are not reported to the authorities. People living in slums are supposed to be rehabilitated as part of India's "Housing for all" mission, which is currently underway. This appears to be the strategy that has been put in place to counterbalance the evictions and demolitions. A closer look, on the other hand, reveals the reasons why these provisions are insufficient.

Housing for all Policy

The Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, has stated that his vision for the year 2022 is very inclusive and that the poorest of the poor ought to have a home of their own. In addition, the house must be equipped with electricity, water, and other amenities, and hospitals and schools must be in the immediate vicinity of the house. Following the development of this vision, the government launched the 'Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Housing for All' (Figure 2) mission in 2015, with the goal of providing housing for all in urban areas by 2022 (Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, 2022).

Housing for slum dwellers will be provided through slum rehabilitation schemes, which will be carried out by private developers. As authorised by the SRA, private developers can redevelop blighted areas by relocating residents into newly constructed multi-story buildings while using the remaining land to construct residential and commercial structures for sale on the open market. The idea is that the costs of constructing housing for slum dwellers will be offset by the profits made from private sales of the housing. But, unfortunately, privatisation of slum redevelopment opens the process up to corruption because the amount of money that can be made from new land sales in urban areas, particularly in Mumbai, is said to be enormous, making it an attractive investment.

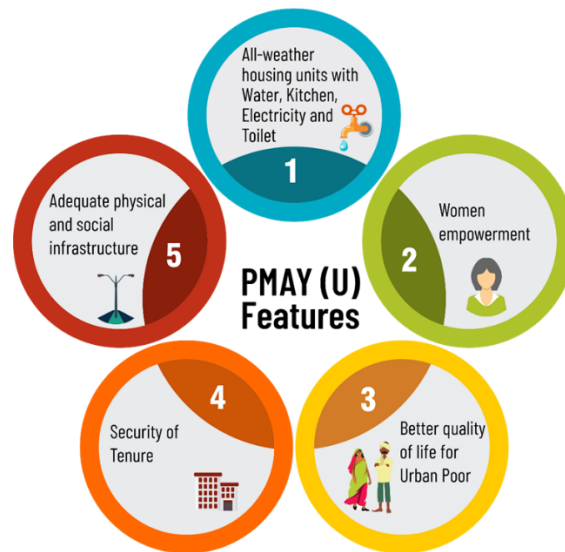


Figure 2: Housing for all

Source: Diagram from the Publicly available documentation from the Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India, <https://pmay-urban.gov.in/about>

Housing for the poor is provided by central and various state governments through welfare schemes and rehabilitation schemes. To obtain housing under these welfare and rehabilitation schemes, the applicants must meet the eligibility criteria set by the

body governing the scheme. Many needy persons who are equally economically backwards find themselves being ruled out from getting the benefit of the scheme. Some of the current difficulties in those eligibility criteria are tabulated below:

Eligibility Criteria

Holding ownership

The length of time spent in the current home or area is taken into consideration when determining eligibility. An applicant must provide proof that the family has resided in the country for a specified number of years prior to the application deadline. This applies to areas where a rehabilitation scheme is proposed, and an area has been designated as a potential development site, among other things.

Critical Concerns

As victims of repeated demolition despite living in the same space for decades, they have difficulties proving their ownership. Lack of literacy and forethought to preserve any indirect documentation such as water bills and electricity bills allude to their ownership. It is difficult, if not impossible, to establish legal residency without the assistance of additional documents. In addition, some thought is required to accommodate the stresses and strains and health impacts caused by temporary relocation spaces. A rule that stipulates ownership has little relevance because their homes are constructed on government or private land, making it impossible to enforce the rule.

The scheme may cater to a specific segment of society with a particular income level, but it fails to take into consideration many people who live in metropolitan areas. In Mumbai, for example, more than 60% of the population lives in squalid, improvised housing. The UN Special Rapporteur

on Adequate Housing, Leilani Farah, expressed the importance of such a law in her report to the United Nations Human Rights Council during the 34th session, which took place in 2017, She opined that India ought to have a visionary and coherent piece of legislation that regards

housing rights (Khan & Gupta, 2017). Undoubtedly, a national housing law that aims to address growing inequalities while also providing a long-term road map is required. As a result, India's economy continues to grow and is expected to continue to do so, implying that the country will continue to have the resources necessary to implement the right to adequate housing throughout the country fully (Gopalan and Venkataraman, 2015; Khan and Gupta, 2017).

When it comes to the Prime Minister's Awas Yojana, a recent study argued that the poor spend a greater proportion of their income on basic needs and therefore do not have enough disposable income to pay for an affordable home. They looked at data from 22 different cities (Kumar and Shukla, 2022). Even though urban slum communities in New Delhi, India's capital, seem to have a better standard of living for migrants, many end up living in deplorable conditions (Nasreen and Singh, 2020). According to the available data, the houses' physical condition was significantly better, but the inhabitants were affected by illiteracy, ignorance, and low-income levels insufficient to meet their ends (Mahabir et al., 2016; Nasreen and Singh, 2020).

It is always necessary for cities like Mumbai or Manila to implement plans that alleviate the symptoms that prevent the poor in difficult social circumstances from obtaining a roof over their heads and plans that signal a "fair go" treatment to human life are what we believe should be implemented (Pulla & Khan, 2016). The following case study is provided herewith further validates our critical concerns raised in this study.

Case Study of Golibar Slum

Slum-dwellers have been given a voice through urban social work activism. And the narratives from the Golibar Andolan have revealed the constructive alignment between many different segments of Mumbai's citizenry. Residents of the middle class and upper-class neighbourhoods and social work activists and advocates for their own causes interacted with institutions and systems designed to accommodate their

concerns and that of their neighbours and the surrounding society. It appeared that the community organisation campaign known as the Mumbai Golibar Andolan (McQuarrie et al., 2013), (MGA) began in the Golibar urban settlement at first and then spread to many other slum settlements. The social work activism displayed here was within the confines of the constitutional provisions enshrined in the State.

The activists' willingness to negotiate with the Slum Rehabilitation Authority (SRA) while advocating on behalf of slum dwellers is frequently commended by the public; we appealed that 'a roof over one's head' should be prioritised over all other considerations. In reviewing the MGA timelines, the combined role of the middle class and elite citizens, social workers, social activists, researchers, and the underprivileged in their own act of commitment in engaging with agencies and systems that work with their situations is emphasised as well. Clearly, the MGA case study validates that family and community actions that are coordinated and orchestrated provide legitimacy to their shelter and the hope of continuing to live without being evicted.

The MGA struggle was arduous, as 'Golibar', is the second-largest slum in Mumbai. In the dearth of a law to recognise housing as a right, the urban poor in India live under a constant threat of their meagre hovels being demolished by authorities as their habitats are deemed illegal. A formal acceptance of housing as a right would make a big difference to the poor, even if the housing is not of durable standard. It undoubtedly offers them hope and an opportunity to improve their housing condition. Unfortunately, rights-based community work in any area, including housing, appears to be unfavourably regarded, even though the poor seem to be the ones who go to the polling booths and usher in the new governments in many developing countries, and India is not an exception to this. The MGA began in 2011 due to six forced demolition drives of the State. Golibar is 125 acres of land with a ten-year narrative, with 46 housing societies or associations and 26000 families. A private

company called Shivalik ventures was drafted by the Maharashtra Government to develop a rehabilitation plan for Golibar residents. Shivalik chose to make rehabilitation schemes on lands that belong to the Railways and the Defence of the Government of India (Pulla and Khan, 2016). The following section provides the Golibar Timelines.

Golibar Timelines

- With six demolitions that preceded, the community associations invited Medha Patkar a well-known social worker and activist to come to their rescue.
- A series of incidents that took place after her entry into the scenario. With her fast of 9 days in May, of 2011, one of the main outcomes was formation of 2 committees (1) to review irregularities and corruption in SRA and (2) to investigate regularisation of slums. But the builders' lobby was quite powerful to ensure that the two committees were made dysfunctional.
- A couple of years later in January 2013, an enquiry took place as a result of 10 day long mass action. Evictees, residents, community leaders and activists consulted. But net outcomes were further illegal demolitions.
- 18 March 2013. Two hundred people reached the Ministry of Housing and Poverty Alleviation, in New Delhi. Minister, Ajay Makhen received the representations and listened to Medha Patkar
- 2 April— Minister Makhen writes to Chief Minister of Maharashtra and urges the CM to 'protect the already marginalised poor'
- That very afternoon of the letter, 43 houses were demolished with 500 policemen standing as security and with a demolition squad of 200 men.
- 4th April Medha Patkar decries the incidents and condemns the nexus and lets the Government know that she is "forced to sit on hunger strike in less than years at the same place in Golibar, Mumbai for the same cause"
- 6th April Madhuri Shivkar, a resident of Sion Koliwada and Medha Patkar begin their indefinite fast. Later in the day a 'Mashal juloosh' (literally means flaming torch light procession) was taken by the slum dwellers.
- 7th April 2013 MGA charges the establishment and business hand in glove actions in press
- 9th April 2013 the national human rights commission issues a notice to the Chief Secretary of Maharashtra and the Director General of Police (DGP) with a response time of two weeks.
- Medha Patkar's health deteriorates but she continues to sit in the Hunger strike camps and refuses medical attention by the Government
- Justice Rajendra Sachar, and the film maker Anand Patwardhan express solidarity
- Community organisation and volunteers take over the dream of roof over their head
- Women leaders Anwari begum, Nazreen Banu, Mamata Dalvi, Rajshri Thakur, Suhasini Mesti and several others reel through the days of the struggle and join the hunger strike
- Peaceful demonstrations to express solidarity were held in Hyderabad, in Chennai by unorganised workers federation, (UWF) and the coastal people's protection movement workers.
- 10 April slum dwellers enter Mantralaya, the Secretariat of the Government of Maharashtra. Medha Patkar's health grows weaker by the day. Other activists such as Aruna Roy, Late Swami Agnivesh, Supreme Court Lawyer Prashant Bhushan, and others join in solidarity. In Bengaluru a revolt by the Ejipura slum dwellers takes place and they storm the Karnataka state congress office. Nationwide sparks ignite.

Case Study of Slums Adjacent to Mangroves

In the span of less than a year, the Mangrove Cell of the Maharashtra Forest Department has evicted more than 4000 families in Mumbai and Navi Mumbai without providing any rehabilitation. The Forest Department's actions are rendering more and more families in Mumbai homeless.

In 2005, the Bombay High Court issued an order regarding the protection of mangroves in the Mumbai and Navi Mumbai metropolitan areas. The Court ordered that mangrove areas and the area within a 50-meter buffer zone be designated as 'protected forests' and that all construction activities be prohibited in these

locations. Suddenly, ten years after issuing the order, in 2013, the Forest Department began evicting squatters from areas near mangrove swamps (see, Figure 3 for a quick view). The Indian Forest Act of 1927 outlines a comprehensive legal procedure for settling the rights of people who live in forest areas, and it is still in effect today. The Indian Forest Act, 1927, contains a full law procedure regarding the settlement of rights of the people living in forest areas. The Act stipulates that settlement/rehabilitation must be completed prior to constituting any land as 'reserved forest.' This procedure has not been completed yet.



Figure 3: The Vast Mangrove Forests of Mumbai as seen from the Air
 Source: Priya Florence Sha, 3 June 2018, CC-BY-SA-4.0

Eviction has a significant negative impact on those uprooted from their habitats. The education of school-going children is severely hampered, and it is difficult for elderly people to obtain assistance during times of crisis. Women must make concessions when it comes to their privacy. Eviction is also followed by a rash of serious diseases, owing to a lack of sanitation

facilities and nutritious food and the fact that people are forced to live in the open without adequate shelter. In addition, the act of eviction further marginalises poor people, increasing inequality in society as a result of this (Ghar Bachao Ghar Banao Andolan, 2016).

The Supreme Court of India has declared "adequate housing" to be a fundamental human

right on several occasions. For example, in the case of Chameli Singh and Others vs. State of Uttar Pradesh (1996), the Supreme Court provided a clear understanding of this right to petition. The following is what it says:

Shelter for a human being, therefore, is not a mere protection of his life and limb. It is home where he has opportunities to grow physically, intellectually, and spiritually. Right to shelter, therefore, includes adequate living space, safe and decent structure, clean and decent surroundings, sufficient light, pure air and water, electricity, sanitation, and other civic amenities like roads etc. So as to have easy access to his daily avocation. The right to shelter, therefore, does not mean a mere right to a roof over one's head but right to all the infrastructure necessary to enable them to live and develop as a human being. Right to shelter when used as an essential requisite to the right to live should be deemed to have been guaranteed as a fundamental right... want of decent residence therefore frustrates the very object of the constitutional animation of right to equality, economic justice, fundamental right to residence, dignity of person and right to live itself.

Supreme Court of India 1995, 15 December

No Legislative Support

The slums are not constructed solely for the purpose of encroaching on a piece of land. Slums are the result of systemic failures. The State's inability to address issues such as livelihood, access to equal opportunity, housing, and other related matters is a significant issue. It is unfortunate that instead of finding alternatives to interventions in those habitats, the nexus of private business interests and public entrepreneurs – the State appears to see the slums as problems without considering the hard work and labour provided to run the cities resides in those slums. We shudder to think if the urban poor unites in solidarity and does not report to work, even for a day, our cities will halt. These are citizens of the same city that work in various trades and run the cities and keep the cities clean and construct roads, delivers service and build tall towers. Some of them run taxis, auto-rickshaw drivers, or work as fruit and vegetable sellers, carpenters, electricians, painters, domestic helpers, and numerous other occupations in a variety of settings (Bhattacharyya et al., 2020).

Currently, no national legislation recognises housing as a human right, even though legislation recognising other human rights, such as the right to food, does exist. Several food security and food distribution programmes, such as subsidised cereals and new programmes, such as maternity benefits, were made legally enforceable by the National Food Security Act, which went into effect in July 2013. To achieve this, the government plans to provide subsidised monthly household rations to over 800 million people, or more than 60% of the country's population, each year. The Act shifted the focus away from a welfare-based approach and towards a rights-based approach. Through the Right to Education Act, which came into effect in April 2010, India has also made education a legal entitlement for all children between the ages of 6 and 14 years old, in accordance with Article 21A of the Constitution, and has mandated that 25 per cent of places in private schools be reserved for children from low-income families and other vulnerable groups. That is because

those legislations on food and education are regarded as models that could be used as a guide for developing and adopting national housing legislation based on human rights.

Similarly, the plight of people who must face demolition of their slum houses on account of being illegal is highlighted in the case of an Unnamed Girl Child of 13 days Vs. The State of Maharashtra. In the matter, the Bombay High Court expressed the necessity of a law to protect their rights. The Bombay High Court said that:

18. For the present, we have found and from the narration of the facts and the arguments that, a right is claimed to reside in such land only because it is not possible to afford any decent housing accommodation in the city of Mumbai. It is stated that we must take note of the plight of such persons who move around the State/country and in search of livelihood and decent living coming to Mumbai, but their dreams are shattered as it is not possible to make a living except by unfair and illegal means. It is the plight of such persons and occupants which is highlighted. However, even to extend to such persons any benefit or any assistance, there has to be a legislation or law in the field (Khan, 2020).

In fact, the Supreme Court and various High Courts have stated on numerous occasions that the right to adequate shelter is an integral part of the right to life. Any person's survival is jeopardised by the denial of shelter or forced homelessness, which is a clear violation of the 'right to life' guaranteed under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. Following the footsteps of the Universal Declaration of Basic Human Rights and the International Covenant on Social and Cultural Rights, the Indian government recognised the right to housing as a fundamental human right but did little to ensure that it was implemented in both letters and spirit. It is necessary to pass legislation that recognises housing as a fundamental human right.

The slum dwellers do not beg for an empty playground or the park spaces on Mumbai Earth

but beg to be allowed to place a tarpaulin shelter to live or squat over dumps and sewer debris. But when the 'poor' do it, their reclamation activity is considered unlawful. Sometimes, some attention from middle-class social activists and conscientious civil libertarians also appears on the horizon in defence of the right to shelter the poor. The pandemic lockdown has been harsh on the urban poor because of the loss of their livelihoods and impending subsequent hunger crisis, exacerbated by the poor infrastructure and lack of basic amenities in their

habitats (Bhattacharyya et al., 2020). The slum dwellers were forced to breach the physical distancing norm all the time. Such meagre living conditions constantly pose the risk of contracting the virus and getting penalised by the police and health authorities or both. It was impossible to maintain physical distancing due to the overcrowded nature of their housing, narrow/dingy lanes and clearly lack of basic amenities in these settlements. This can be evidenced by the photos interspersed in this study (Figures 1 and 4).



Figure 4: Overcrowded Slum Shelters in Mumbai

Source: Dr Yue Zhang

Social Work Reflections

Movements such as the 'Golibar Andolan of Mumbai' work with affected communities and help them to establish slum leadership structures. They argue that housing is a fundamental human right and that the Indian government cannot refuse to provide it solely since it is illegal. The real estate boom in Mumbai has resulted in widespread slum demolition; the fight for justice and equality is not only for housing but also for economic development.

These movements fight corruption, malpractice, and demonstrations against resource accumulation, such as the concentration of wealth in the hands of a small number of individuals.

Even though slum rehabilitation is intended to increase the availability of housing, community organisations and people's movements claim that demolitions and rehabilitation displace more residents than are rehoused during the

process. Many of those who have been rehoused are also returning to the slums because they are unable to afford the maintenance costs, which are far beyond their financial means because they are not protected by the Slum Rehabilitation Authority (SRA). For slum residents, social workers and activists are actively fighting against local government agendas, greedy and unscrupulous developers,

and inadequate regulation of the SRA's projects to secure the right to affordable housing for themselves and their families. Even when developers are given strict orders to refrain from evictions and demolitions while an investigation is underway, demolitions are still carried out on a regular basis. The following is an account of a social worker from a slum in Mumbai:

A slum, in one of Mumbai's most prestigious neighbourhoods', Yaari Road, was unnecessarily evicted when some unknown land mafia arrived to begin illegal dumping in the vicinity of a mangrove area adjoining the slum. The following day, I came across an article about it in the newspaper. After receiving complaints about illegal dumping from locals, the State Forest Minister and the Shiv Sena's youth leader visited the site the day before the action and spoke with residents about their concerns.

The newspaper did not cover the eviction as a news story, but rather as a story about steps taken by the authorities to stop illegal dumping.

A few days after the incident, the specifics of the eviction were brought to my attention by a national daily journalist who used to live in the same suburb where the slum housing had been in existence for years and had heard about it. The housemaid who works for the Journalist is a resident of that squalid enclave. During the eviction process, her roof was also demolished. As a result, I began investigating existing laws and rules to determine whether the people who had been evicted were entitled to any protection under the law or rule.

The local community should have stepped in to help because the authorities' responsibility was only to prevent illegal dumping and not to evict people who had been living in the area for more than a decade, which included the Journalist who lived in the suburb in question.

I asked the reporter if we could approach the wealthy and middle-class people who live in skyscrapers and ask them to assist those whose homes had been destroyed. She stated categorically that it was unlikely and that no one would pay attention. Ironically, though, people whose homes were demolished continued to provide services such as home maids, laundry, transportation for children to and from school, and other chores, while the residents of the skyscrapers turned a blind eye when it came to helping them.

I worked extremely hard to prevent the slum from being demolished, which is in constant danger of being demolished, and to work with the municipal corporation to ensure that basic facilities were provided in the slum at the same time as I was working to save the slum

(Social Worker, 2020: Personal Communique)

In addition, the most challenging obstacle a social worker faces in community work is a lack of support from the inhabitants themselves, who are all under the influence of the slum mafia, which regulates the supply of water through private water tankers and provides illegal power connections to residents. It was the community organisation's goal to hold several meetings in the slum in order to raise awareness of the work that social work activists are doing for the

community in terms of negotiating settlements with the SRA, which may result in the provision of water services and even electricity through legal means for the residents. People living in slums are caught in a cycle of their own learned helplessness, and they do not appear to see any other way out. Because people do not believe that the government is interested in assisting poor slum dwellers, no one wants to come forwards in support because they fear that if

they support the activist, they will lose whatever benefits they are receiving from the mafia by paying the extortionate rates. This phenomenon is referred to as "learned helplessness" popularised in the early seventies by Dr. Martin Seligman (1972). Ultimately, it comes down to the ability to exercise control. Like a child, the slum dweller is also exposed to repeated evictions something about which he/she feels cannot control. This is the root cause of 'learned helplessness' (Seligman, 1972). The brain begins to count on the failed attempts and does not see any further hope. It is clearly a human conditioning. Even in situations where you can influence a different outcome for the better, they become negative and fatalistic and hence lose control over their situation.

The selfishness and fence-sitting demonstrated in the examples above play a significant role in preventing individuals from taking a stand and fighting for themselves or all of humanity. Coming forwards to fight against justice does not appear to be a high priority, even for their own rights. Is it possible to shift the blame to the government without first uniting ourselves? We are not sure how social workers can function in the face of such apathy.

Conclusion

Currently, housing has become a high-priced commodity, particularly in large cities that receive bouts of inter-state and regional migrants (Bhattacharyya et al., 2020; Khan, 2020; Iyer, 2020). The poorest of the poor have only access to housing in 'illegal' slum settlements, where they live a life of deprivation and exploitation. Poverty cannot certainly become an excuse to deprive someone of what is legitimately due for them. Certainly, this pandemic has highlighted the system's flaws and the absence of adequate health infrastructure and facilities in the country. Nonetheless, we see the private- public partnerships and their nexus continuing to move forwards with plans for high-rise buildings and smart cities without taking into consideration what people require to survive. The pandemic once again raises the question: does the state and its machinery work and devise plans for the survival of the privileged

rather than the survival of the vulnerable? The answer seems to reside in proactive citizen initiatives and the identification of flaws in the systems by those who man the systems. A critical and dispassionate review must emerge from within the State and the systems.

Communities appear to recognise the value in having someone from outside their borders come in and support them. However, they do not seem to organise themselves from within in order to contest for what is legitimately due to them or even begin to deal with their oppression by themselves. We do not know whether this is due to a lack of ability, apathy, or simply indifference.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have reported no conflict of interest.

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Author Contribution Statement

Bilal Khan, the second author provided the manuscript draft, who has been working in the sector of community housing and part of *Ghar Bachao Ghar Banao Andolan*, a movement of slum residents of Mumbai. The case studies were also submitted by him, and he took on the

responsibility of conducting research and is accountable for the contents of the article. Both the authors presented an excerpt of this study in 2016 at the 5th International Conference on Spirituality and Social Work entitled *Building Resilience for Sustainable Development* 18-20 February 2016, Ahmednagar, Maharashtra, India. Elizabeth Carter, Editorial Assistant at Writers Assistance Services, worked on the earlier drafts.

The first author's significant contributions are the development of the urban rights movement, case study, research mentorship to the second author, Bilal Khan since 2016; conception, study design, acquisition of data, analysis, and interpretations in the study. In addition, the first author also revised and proofread the final manuscript.