

# ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF RESETTLEMENT ON LIVELIHOODS OF FAMILIES IN PERUMBAKKAM, CHENNAI: Integrated Cooum River Eco-Restoration Plan (ICRERP)



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PERUMBAKKAM, CHENNAI:  
Integrated Cooum River  
Eco-Restoration Plan (ICRERP)**

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**STUDY BY**

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**&**

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NEW DELHI**



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# I. Introduction

In the year 2010, the Principal Secretary, Home Department, Government of Tamil Nadu (GoTN), in reference to the *en masse* housing programme in Kannagi Nagar and Semmenchery<sup>1</sup> had clearly pointed out that, “This kind of concentration of slum population in one place is not desirable and that future programmes should ensure that they are more distributed and there is mixed development.” He requested that smaller plots of land should be provided to the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board (TNSCB) for rehabilitation and resettlement (R&R) schemes at different places for this purpose.

The Managing Director (MD), TNSCB, also stated that when such large resettlement projects are taken up, “There is a need for service delivery; otherwise it brings a bad name to the government as well as renders the entire process in-fructuous given that these people are the most disadvantaged sections who have been deprived of their livelihood and also have been moved out of their homes within the city.”<sup>2</sup>

Despite the fact that GoTN is aware of the gaps in its *en masse* housing programmes (including deprivation of livelihood, as stated by MD of TNSCB), there are plans for constructing 44,870 tenements at a cost of Rs 2431.16 crore<sup>3</sup> as “Integrated Townships” in the mega cities of the state – namely Chennai, Madurai, and Coimbatore – to resettle families living in “objectionable locations” as declared under the erstwhile Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM).<sup>4</sup>

## Perumbakkam: The Site of Study

The Perumbakkam Housing Scheme was initiated in 2011 by TNSCB to resettle residents from Chennai District to Chengalpattu District. The resettlement site of Perumbakkam is located about 25 to 30 kilometres from the original places of habitation of affected communities. It is situated behind the existing relocation settlement of Semmenchery, about 10 kilometres away from the resettlement site of Kannagi Nagar.

People have been resettled in Perumbakkam without considering the fact that livelihoods of relocated communities are location-centric, and, therefore, living in these distant sites is not viable for them.

The Master Plan for Chennai clearly mentions that 78.47 per cent of those living in ‘informal settlements’ walk to their work place, 5.52 per cent use cycles and 15.76 per cent use buses or trains for commuting to their work place, clearly indicating the integral linkage of the place of habitation to that of livelihood and survival.<sup>5</sup>

Though Perumbakkam was to comprise 23,864 houses when completed,<sup>6</sup> the number of houses was reduced to 20,376 houses after an observation in a 2014 audit report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG).<sup>7</sup>

### **Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India**

“The extent of land allotted to TNSCB for Perumbakkam project was 81.20 hectares. Maximum dwelling units permissible in the project area as per the National Building Code of India (NBC) norms were 12,180 hectares only. However, construction of 23,864 dwelling units was proposed with a density of 294 dwelling units per hectare thereby causing congestion at the site which resulted in public criticism and prompted GoTN to change location for 3,488 units. Even considering construction of 20,376 tenements in the site, the density would be 251 units per hectare, which exceed the norms of the NBC.”

*~ Audit report (General and Social Sector) of the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India, for the year ended 31 March 2014*

As per the National Building Code of India (NBC) norms, the site was to consist of only 12,180 houses but this was violated by TNSCB and the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority (CMDA) that approved the plan. This has resulted in Perumbakkam evolving as a congested settlement that faced heightened risks for its residents during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Large-scale relocation to Perumbakkam commenced in the year 2015, after the Chennai floods, when over 4,000 families residing on the banks of the Adyar River were shifted to the settlement. Since November 2016, over 10,868 families (nearly 43,472 individuals) from 43 ‘informal settlements’ in Chennai have been resettled in the sites of Perumbakkam in Chengalpattu District; Navalur in Kanchipuram District; AIR Site in Chennai District; and Gudapakkam in Thiruvallur District. These families were evicted under the Integrated Cooum River Eco-Restoration Plan (ICRERP) funded by the Chennai Rivers Restoration Trust (CRRT) and implemented by the Public Works Department (PWD), Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC), and Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board (TNSCB). Of the 10,868 families evicted and resettled, 85 per cent (9,257 families) were shifted to Perumbakkam.

Currently, more than 18,000 families live in Perumbakkam. Reports indicate that resettled families continue to face persistent challenges, including loss of livelihood. Following-up on a detailed human rights study in Perumbakkam (2017)<sup>8</sup> and a rapid assessment study (2019),<sup>9</sup> Information and Resource Centre for the Deprived Urban Communities (IRCDUC)<sup>10</sup> and Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN),<sup>11</sup> New Delhi, decided to undertake another study to assess the impacts of resettlement on the livelihoods of families relocated to Perumbakkam. This rapid assessment study also seeks to document the impacts of the COVID-19 lockdown on the lives and livelihoods of the resettled families.

This report uses the human rights framework provided by international law and guidelines, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;<sup>12</sup> General Comment 4 (‘The right to adequate housing’) of the United Nations (UN) Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;<sup>13</sup> and, the UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-based Evictions and Displacement<sup>14</sup> to analyse the current living conditions of the resettled families, especially their human right to work/livelihood.

## II. Study Rationale, Objectives, and Methodology

This rapid assessment was undertaken after IRCDUC received several complaints from residents of Perumbakkam during its regular work and interaction with the families.

### Objectives of the Study

The main goals of this study are to:

- Document and assess the impact of resettlement on the livelihoods of affected families;
- Understand specific impacts of the COVID-19 lockdown and related economic crisis on livelihoods of resettled families; and,
- Propose recommendations to Government of Tamil Nadu based on the findings.

### Methodology of the Study

Researchers working at IRCDUC developed a questionnaire to assess the impact of resettlement on the livelihoods of families resettled in Perumbakkam under ICRERP. Data was collected and analysed using Google Forms. Trained field investigators from IRCDUC conducted the assessment in the months of September to November 2020.



Image 1: Discussion with women of the community

Image 2: Data collection by trained volunteers



## Sample Selection Criteria

- Questionnaires were administered only to families that were relocated to Perumbakkam between 2017 and 2020 under ICRERP. During this period, 9,055 families (36,220 individuals) were shifted to Perumbakkam.
- A sample size of 15 per cent of the total number of families resettled in Perumbakkam from 2017 to 2020 (1,314 families) was selected, using random sampling methods.
- The field investigators ensured that families relocated from different locations during different periods were interviewed.
- Focus Group Discussions were carried out to understand the specific impacts of the COVID-19 lockdown.

Image 3: Sample Size



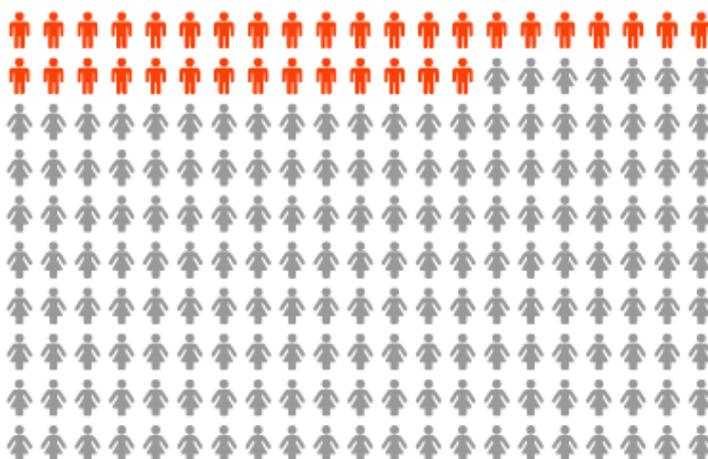
To ensure objectivity, the research investigators initially identified the blocks where these families live, and after identification of the blocks, they administered the questionnaire to families living on different floors in the same block.

# III. Major Findings

## Population Profile

Of the total 1,314 respondents, 1,095 were women and 219 were men. During the assessment process, field investigators found many more women at home, and hence the number of women respondents is higher.

Image 4: Sex of the Respondents

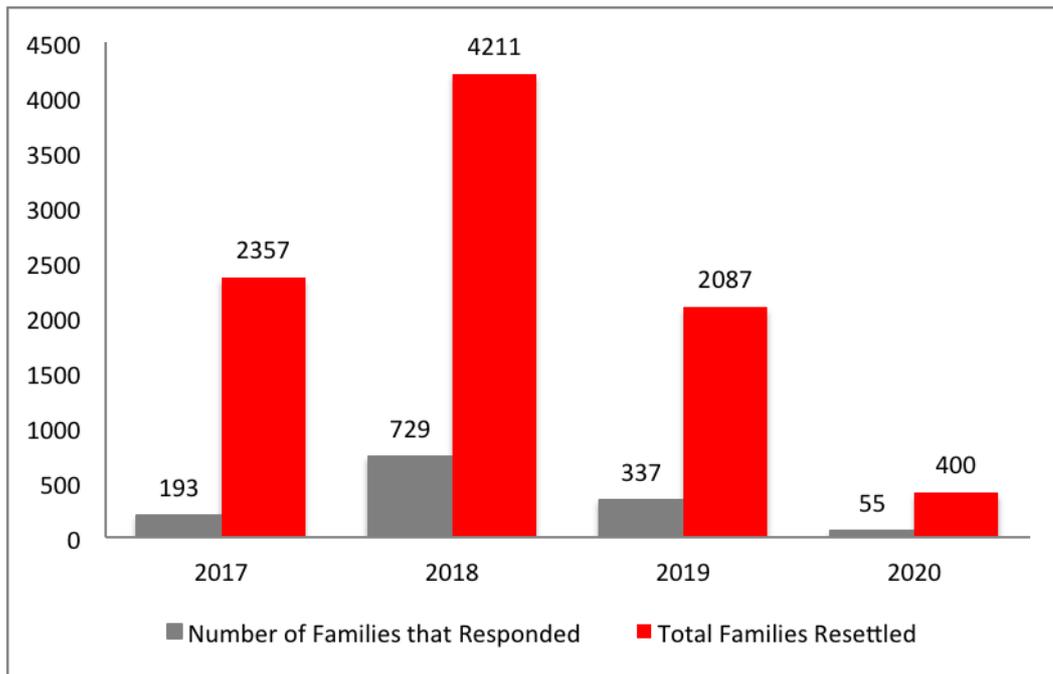


This assessment covers 8.3 per cent of families (193 families) evicted in the year 2017, 17.3 per cent of (729 families) evicted in the year 2018, 16.1 per cent of families (337 families) evicted in the year 2019, and 13.8 per cent of the families (55 families) evicted in the year 2020.

Table 1: Year-wise Sample Size

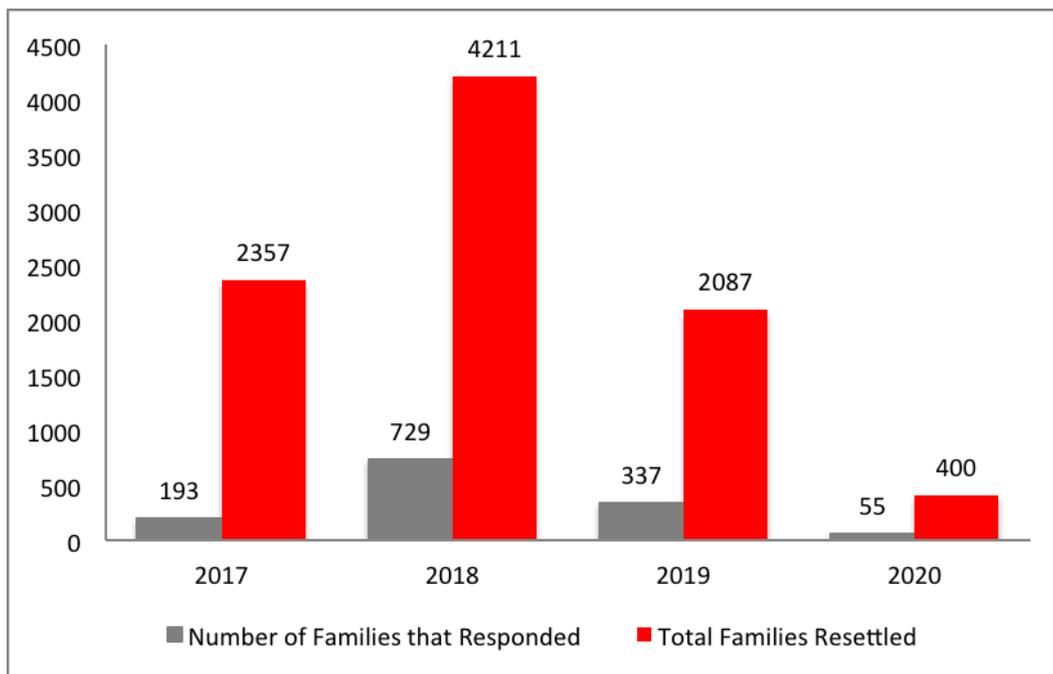
Year of Resettlement	Sample Size (in %)
2017	8.2
2018	17.3
2019	16.1
2020	13.8

**Image 5: Year of Relocation**



Ninety-two per cent of the respondents (1,214) belong to Scheduled Castes and only 5 per cent and 2 per cent, respectively, are from the Backward and Most Backward Classes.

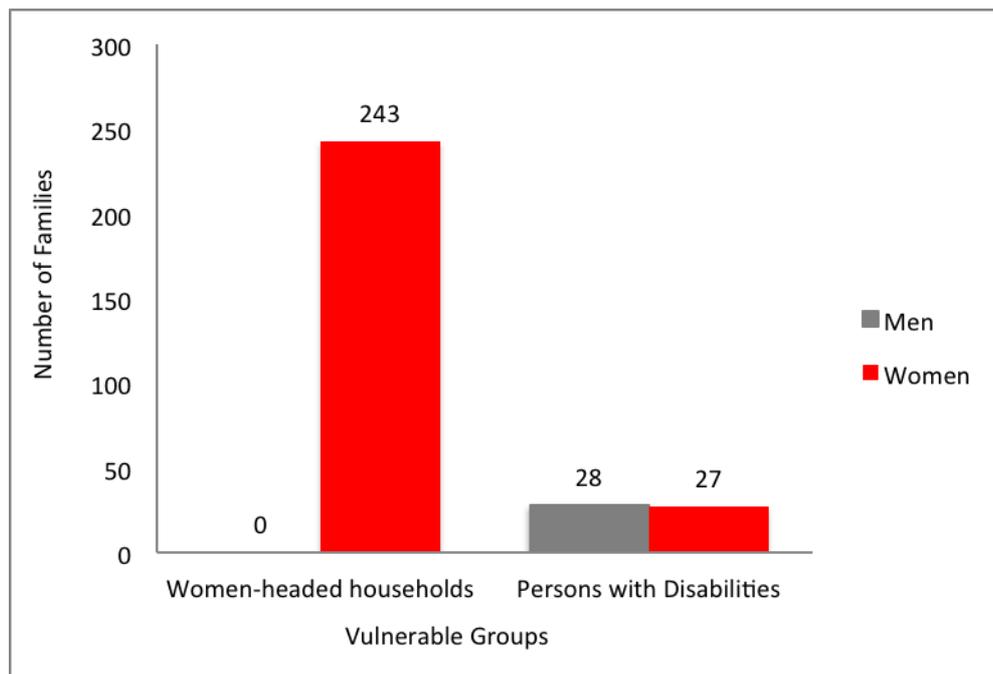
**Image 6: Caste Profile**



## Vulnerability Analysis

- Of the 1,314 respondents, 298 respondents (23 per cent) belong to different marginalized groups.
- Of these 298 respondents, 243 are women-headed households and 55 respondents are persons with disabilities.

Image 7: Gender Analysis of Vulnerable Groups



The assessment reveals that 18 per cent of the total families surveyed are women-headed families.

## Violation of the Human Right to Work/Livelihood

### Article 6, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)

The State Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right to work, which includes the right of everyone to the opportunity to gain his living by work which he freely chooses or accepts, and will take appropriate steps to safeguard this right.

### Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, Questionnaire on Women and Housing, A/HRC/4/18 (2007)

All individuals and communities have a right to a place to live without threat of dispossession from their land, all forms of their property, their homes and resources, as well as all individual and collective holdings required to sustain their livelihoods.

### UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-based Evictions and Displacement (2007)

43. Evictions should not result in individuals being rendered homeless or vulnerable to the violation of other human rights. The State must make provision for the adoption of all appropriate measures, to the maximum of its available resources, especially for those who are unable to provide for themselves, to ensure that adequate alternative housing, resettlement or access to productive land, as the case may be, is available and provided. **Alternative housing should be situated as close as possible to the original place of residence and source of livelihood of those evicted.**

52. Competent authorities shall ensure that evicted persons or groups, especially those who are unable to provide for themselves, have safe and secure access to: (a) essential food, potable water and sanitation; (b) basic shelter and housing; (c) appropriate clothing; (d) essential medical services; (e) **livelihood sources**; (f) fodder for livestock and access to common property resources previously depended upon; and (g) education for children and childcare facilities [emphasis added].

63. To the extent not covered by assistance for relocation, the assessment of economic damage should take into consideration losses and costs, for example, of land plots and house structures; contents; infrastructure; mortgage or other debt penalties; interim housing; bureaucratic and legal fees; alternative housing; lost wages and incomes; lost educational opportunities; health and medical care; resettlement and transportation costs (especially in the case of relocation far from the source of livelihood). Where the home and land also provide a source of livelihood for the evicted inhabitants, impact and **loss assessment must account for the value of business losses, equipment/ inventory, livestock, land, trees/crops, and lost/decreased wages/income** [emphasis added].

Of the 1,314 respondents, only 71 respondents (5 per cent) were unemployed prior to relocation. Of the 71 respondents who were unemployed before relocation, nine persons started working after relocation. Of the nine, one person was employed as a nurse and the other as a salesperson in a showroom. The other seven individuals started their own businesses, including petty shops and juice outlets. None of the seven individuals who initiated their businesses after resettlement received any support from either the government or from non-government organizations (NGOs) working at the site.

### Profile of Employment of Men and Women Before Relocation

Table 2: Livelihood of Men Before Relocation

	Livelihood of Men Before Relocation	Number of Persons Employed	Percentage of Persons Employed
1.	Employed in Repair Service Outlets – Air Conditioners /Refrigerator/Fan/Car/Two Wheelers	12	5.5
2.	Owner of Petty Shop	1	0.5
3.	Autorickshaw Driver (Rental)	18	8.2
4.	Car/Tempo Driver (Rental)	3	1.4
5.	Carpenter	3	1.4
6.	Name Board/Car Sticker Designer	3	1.4
7.	Housekeeping Service Provider	1	0.5
8.	Engaged in Cloth Business	2	0.9
9.	Construction Worker	6	2.7
10.	Employed in Office/Company/Clinics	10	4.6

11.	Courier/Parcel Delivery Person	2	0.9
12.	Cook	1	0.5
13.	Daily-wage Worker	19	8.7
14.	Car Driver (Owner)	1	0.5
15.	Electrician	3	1.4
16.	Employed in Electronics Shop	1	0.5
17.	Fish Worker	20	9.1
18.	Fruits/Vegetables Vendor	5	2.3
19.	Load Carrier	9	4.1
20.	Lift Operator	1	0.5
21.	Employed in Meat Shop	8	3.7
22.	Painter	28	12.8
23.	Employed in Other Shops	6	2.7
24.	Photo Editor/Printer	3	1.4
25.	Employed in Puncture Shop	4	1.8
26.	Rickshaw Driver	1	0.5
27.	Sales Person in Retail Outlets	1	0.5
28.	Security Guard	3	1.4
29.	Footwear Vendor	1	0.5
30.	Snacks-shop Owner	3	1.4
31.	Employed in Spare Parts Shop	1	0.5
32.	Tailor	8	3.7
33.	Tea Stall Owner	5	2.3
34.	Tiffin Shop Owner	5	2.3
35.	Vessels Vendor	1	0.5
36.	Wastepaper Shop Owner	2	0.9
37.	Engaged in Water Can Business	2	0.9
38.	Welder	2	0.9
39.	Unemployed	14	6.4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The assessment reveals that men worked in 38 different forms of employment before their relocation to Perumbakkam. Only 6.4 per cent of the men were unemployed before relocation. Most of the men were employed as painters (12.8 per cent), daily-wage workers (8.7 per cent), autorickshaw drivers (8.2 per cent), and mechanics (5.5 per cent). Only 4.6 per cent of the men worked in the formal sector before relocation.

**Table 3: Livelihood of Women Before Relocation**

	<b>Livelihood of Women Before Relocation</b>	<b>Number of Women Employed</b>	<b>Percentage of Women Employed</b>
1.	Employed in Office/Company	22	2.0
2.	Idli/Dosa Batter Shop Owner	30	2.7
3.	Beautician	2	0.2
4.	Employed in Cardboard Box Making Outlet	1	0.1
5.	Engaged in Cloth Business	53	4.8
6.	Employed in Cell Phone/Electronics Shop	2	0.2
7.	Cleaner in Hotel	1	0.1
8.	Coffee Machine Operator	1	0.1

9.	Conservancy Worker	3	0.3
10.	Cook	4	0.4
11.	Daily-wage Worker	2	0.2
12.	Domestic Helper	458	41.8
13.	Dry Fish Vendor	5	0.5
14.	Employed in Desk Top Publishing Shop	1	0.1
15.	Fancy Store Owner	6	0.5
16.	Fish Worker	40	3.7
17.	Flour Grinding Shop Owner	7	0.6
18.	Flower and Fruit Vendors	61	5.6
19.	Food Stall Owner	17	1.6
20.	Ice Cream Vendor	1	0.1
21.	Ironing Shop Owner	5	0.5
22.	Juice Shop Owner	4	0.4
23.	Petty Shop Owner	74	6.8
24.	Engaged in Milk Distribution Business	2	0.2
25.	Government Employee	1	0.1
26.	Engaged in Renting Vessel Business	1	0.1
27.	Snacks and Soup Stall Owner	32	2.9
28.	Salesperson in Retail Outlet	5	0.5
29.	Disinfectants and Soap Vendor	8	0.7
30.	Tailor	58	5.3
31.	Tea Stall Owner	15	1.4
32.	Tiffin Shop Owner	89	8.1
33.	Toy Vendor	1	0.1
34.	Engaged in Water Can Business	6	0.5
35.	Unemployed	77	7.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,095</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The assessment reveals that only 7 per cent of the women were unemployed prior to relocation. Of those who were working, 41.8 per cent of the women were employed as domestic workers, 6.8 per cent had their own petty shops, 5.8 per cent were vending fruit, flowers, and vegetables, and 5.3 per cent were seamstresses. Only 2 per cent of the women worked in the formal sector whereas 4.6 per cent of men were employed in formal sector before relocation.

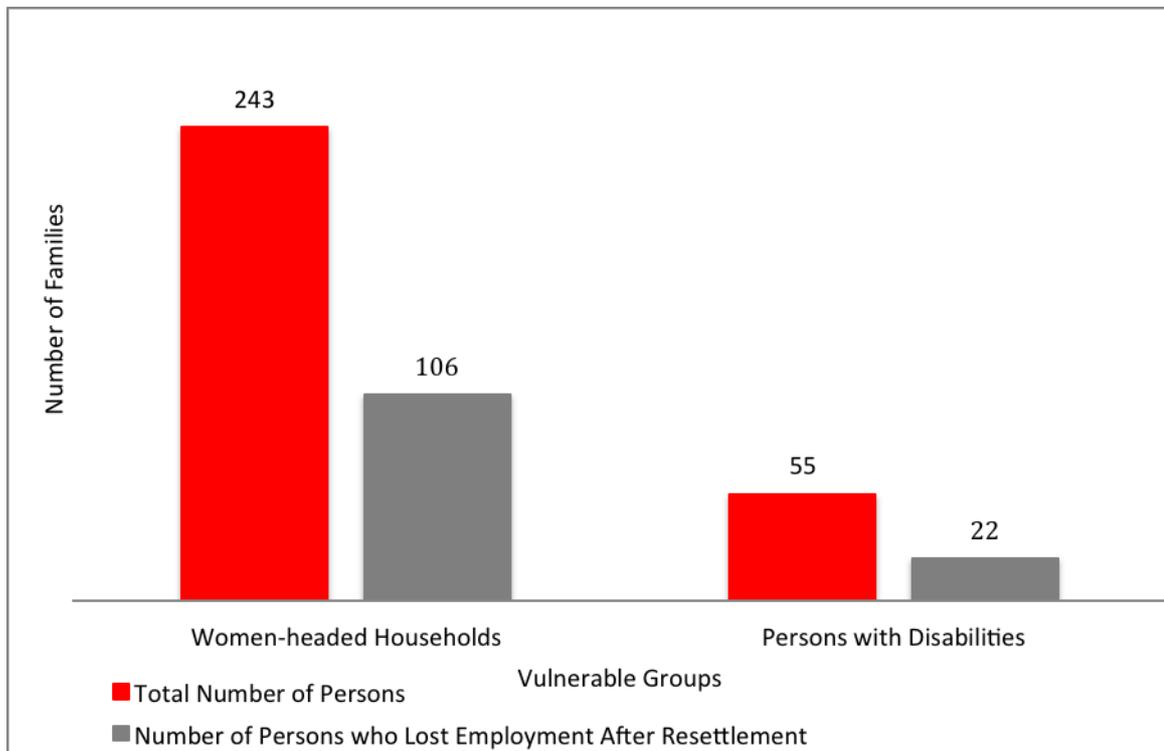
## Loss of Livelihood After Relocation

**Table 4: Employment After Relocation**

	Unemployed Before Relocation	Lost Employment After Relocation	Total Employed	Total Respondents
Men	14	79	126	219
Women	77	550	473	1095
<b>Total in Numbers</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>629</b>	<b>599</b>	<b>1314</b>
<b>Total in Percentage</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>100%</b>

The assessment reveals that **48 per cent of the respondents lost employment after relocation** and were unemployed at the time of this survey. Furthermore, only **46 per cent of the respondents had jobs**. **Forty-four per cent of women from women-headed households lost their livelihoods after relocation** and are still unemployed. The study also found that **40 per cent of persons with disabilities lost their livelihoods after relocation** and are still unemployed.

**Image 8: Details of Vulnerable Groups That Lost Livelihoods After Relocation**



**Table 5: Livelihood Profile of Men Who Lost Employment After Relocation**

	Livelihood	Sector-wise Details of Men Employed	Number of Men Who Lost Livelihood After Relocation	Percentage of Men Who Lost Livelihood After Relocation
1.	Construction Worker	6	3	3.8
2.	Autorickshaw Driver (Rental)	18	3	3.8
3.	Car/Tempo Driver (Rental)	3	2	2.5
4.	Electrician	3	1	1.3
5.	Engaged in Cloth Business	2	1	1.3
6.	Daily-wage Worker	19	11	13.9
7.	Employed in Company/Office	10	4	5.1
8.	Fish Worker	20	9	11.4
9.	Loading Carrier	9	6	7.6
10.	Employed in Meat Shop	8	5	6.3

11.	Employed in Repair Service Outlets – Air Conditioner/ Refrigerator/Fan/Car/ Two-wheeler	12	2	2.5
12.	Painter	28	12	15.2
13.	Courier/Parcel Delivery Person	2	1	1.3
14.	Owner of Petty Shop	6	3	3.8
15.	Employed in Puncture Shop	4	1	1.3
16.	Salesperson in Retail Outlet	1	1	1.3
17.	Security Guard	3	3	3.8
18.	Fruit and Vegetable Vendor	5	5	6.3
19.	Tailor	8	3	3.8
20.	Tea Stall Owner	5	2	2.5
21.	Engaged in Water Can Business	2	1	1.3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The assessment reveals that of the men who lost livelihoods after resettlement, 15.2 per cent were painters, 13.9 per cent were daily-wage workers, and 11.4 per cent were involved in fish vending (includes cutting and cleaning of fish).

**Table 6: Livelihood Profile of Women Who Lost Employment After Relocation**

	Livelihood	Sector-wise Details of Persons Employed	Number of Women Who Lost Livelihood After Resettlement	Percentage of Women Who Lost Livelihood After Relocation
1.	Employed in Office/Company	22	11	2.0
2.	Idli/Dosa Batter Shop Owner	30	14	2.5
3.	Beautician	2	1	0.2
3.	Engaged in Cloth Business	53	36	6.5
4.	Employed in Cell Phone/Electronics Shop	2	1	0.2
5.	Coffee Machine Operator	1	1	0.2
6.	Conservancy Workers	3	2	0.4
7.	Cook	4	1	0.2
8.	Daily-wage Worker	2	2	0.4
9.	Domestic Helper	458	276	50.2
10.	Fancy Store Owner	6	4	0.7
11.	Fish Worker	40	26	4.7
12.	Flour Grinding Shop Owner	7	2	0.4
13.	Flower and Fruit Vendor	61	31	5.6
14.	Food Stall Owner	17	9	1.6
15.	Ice Cream Vendor	1	1	0.2
16.	Ironing Shop Owner	5	3	0.5

17.	Petty Shop Owner	74	34	6.2
18.	Snacks and Soup Stall Owner	32	21	3.8
19.	Disinfectants and Soaps Vendor	8	6	1.1
20.	Tailors	58	21	3.8
21.	Tea Stall Owner	15	7	1.3
22.	Tiffin Shop Owner	89	39	7.1
23.	Toy Vendor	1	1	0.2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>991</b>	<b>550</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The assessment also reveals that of the women who lost livelihoods after resettlement, 50.2 per cent worked as domestic helpers. Of the 458 domestic helpers, 276 lost their employment as a result of relocation. Women dependent on the Chintadripet Fish Market also lost their jobs: 26 of the 40 women involved in fish vending in the market lost work.

Discussions with communities reveal that most of the men and women in Perumbakkam lost employment because of the following reasons:

- The excessive distance from Perumbakkam to original places of habitation. Most people's jobs were near their original homes.
- Lack of employment opportunities in the neighbourhood.
- Inadequate transportation facilities to and from Perumbakkam.
- The absence of adequate day-care facilities for children and the lack of safety in the site. This situation has forced many women to stay at home to take care of their children. The unsafe living conditions in the settlement have greatly restricted mobility of women and children.
- Deserted and dark roads. Women have pointed out that except for the main roads within the settlements, all other cross roads are deserted. Women and girls are afraid to go out alone because of the threat of abuse and violence against them. At night, various parts of the settlement are engulfed in darkness because of the lack of adequate streetlights. Women who travel long distances for work reach home late because of inadequate transportation facilities; they complain that the lack of streetlights in the settlement compromises their safety.

Image 9: Long and deserted cross roads within the settlement



Image 10: Various parts of the settlement have no electricity and are engulfed in darkness (at night)



- The failure to allot specific space for vending activities. This has affected owners of small businesses who could not continue their businesses in Perumbakkam. When people identified spaces for vending, they were unable to continue because of disputes arising due to the lack of space, or because of safety issues.
- Refusal of car, tempo, and autorickshaw owners to rent vehicles to the drivers who moved to Perumbakkam.
- The lack of domestic work opportunities in and around Perumbakkam. Domestic workers complained that they lost their livelihoods, as they used to work in houses near their previous homes. It was difficult for them to travel for over 20 to 30 kilometres (one way), for over two hours, to reach their places of work. They had to spend most of their income on travel expenditure. As mentioned above, the lack of security in the settlement and the absence of day-care centres forced many of the women domestic workers to stay at home. Some women complained that households in the neighbourhood refused to employ women from Perumbakkam, on account of the stigma associated with the resettlement site.
- The absence of markets near Perumbakkam. The study reveals that most of the employment of relocated residents was location-centric and dependent on markets near their previous places of habitation, especially fish markets, electronics markets, and vehicle spare parts and repair markets. There are no market spaces near Perumbakkam that can help in reviving livelihoods of people dependent on such spaces.

"I am a domestic helper and during the lockdown period, I was unable to go to work. I was dependent on the ration shops for relief materials, but we did not receive relief on time. The quality of the relief material received was poor. I also received Rs 1,000 from the ration shop. However, I was unable to manage my family's expenses with this amount. I had to pay interest on my existing debts, buy onion and tomatoes for cooking, and also buy other essentials like toiletries. I felt guilty that I was unable to provide milk and vegetables for my children as I used to prior to the lockdown."

~ A 40-year-old widow from Perumbakkam

"I am the only earning member in my family, I work for daily wages. When we lived in Aminjikarai (nearly 30 kilometres from Perumbakkam), my wife worked as a domestic worker. After our relocation to this site, she stopped working because we have two adolescent girls and we are afraid to leave them alone and go out for work. In the initial days after moving here, my wife used

to go to work but she was unable to continue, as it took nearly two hours for her to reach her place of work. She tried to find work nearby but was unable to do so. During the lockdown, I was unable to go to work, as there was no public transportation facility. Hence, we had no source of income. I was not able to afford smart phones for my children to attend online classes. The family was dependent on relief material provided by NGOs. With no adequate water, how can we wash our hands? We were not able to buy water cans for drinking. I had to buy medicines for my elderly mother from the private pharmacy, as medicines were not available in the Primary Health Centre inside the settlement. I was forced to take more loans during the pandemic to meet the expenses of the family. The government has relocated us and forgotten about us.”

~ A 45-year-old man from Perumbakkam

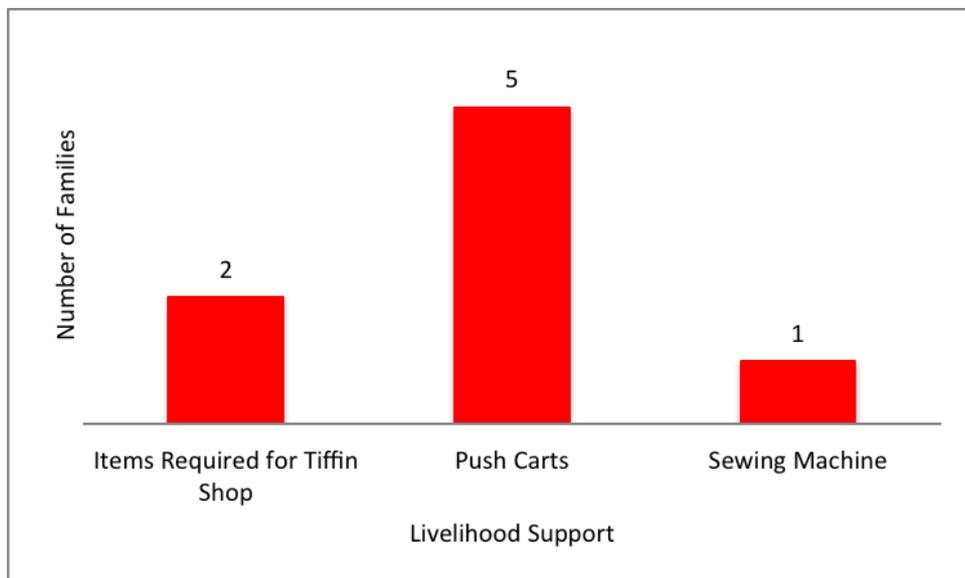
“I am 60 years old. During the lockdown, I was unable to access the old age pension. I did not know whom to approach. My wife and I had to depend on the ration items, which were of poor quality. We received the relief only after two months. We had to depend on our neighbours for our food.”

~ A 60-year-old resident of Perumbakkam

## Access to Livelihood Schemes from the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board (TNSCB)

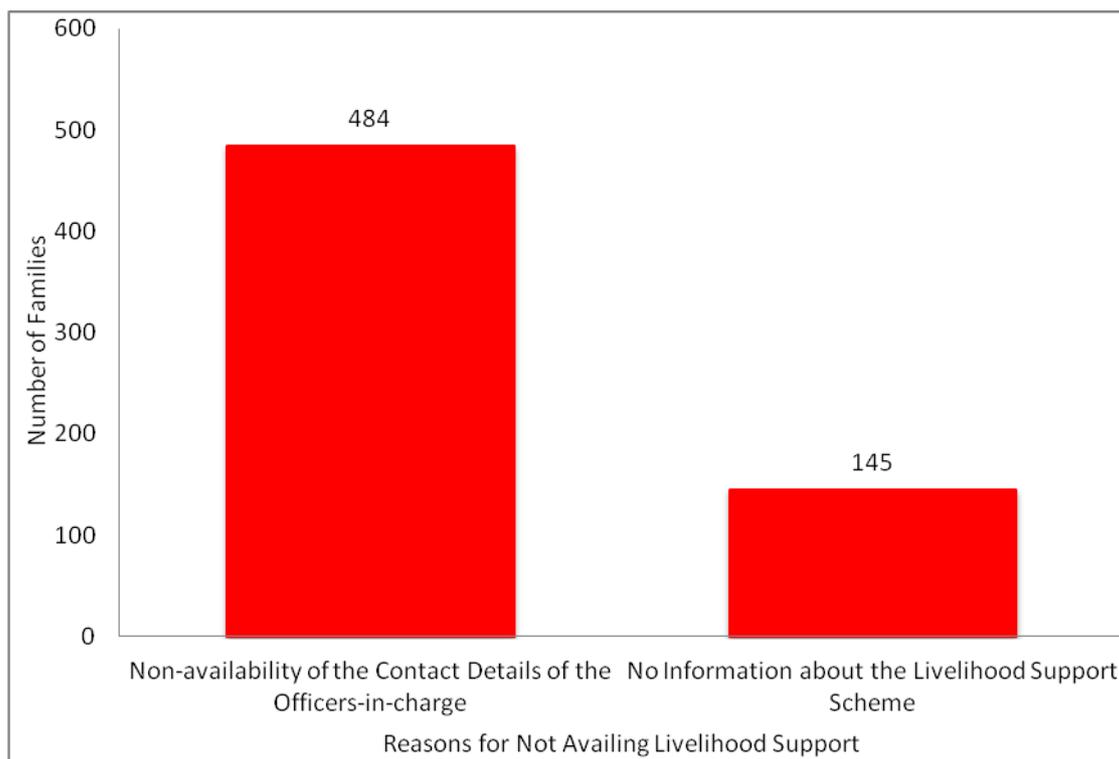
The study reveals that of the 1,314 respondents, only eight accessed the ‘livelihood restoration’ scheme of TNSCB.

**Image 11: Type of Livelihood Support Availed from TNSCB**



The assessment reveals that 62 per cent of the beneficiaries were able to generate adequate income with TNSCB support, whereas 38 per cent were unable to earn enough despite the support.

**Image 12: Reason for Inability to Access Livelihood Support from TNSCB**



This study reveals that the lack of access to information about the government’s livelihood support scheme and contact details of the officers-in-charge are reasons for families not being able to access livelihood support from TNSCB.

### **Impact of the COVID-19 Lockdown on Livelihoods of Resettled Families in Perumbakkam: Findings of the Focus Group Discussions**

To contain COVID-19, the Government of India announced a nationwide lockdown — with only four hours’ notice — for 21 days, from 25 March 2020. On 14 April 2020, the lockdown was extended till 3 May 2020 and subsequently in phases, till 21 May 2020. Phased re-opening began only after 75 days of lockdown, from 8 June 2020 onwards.

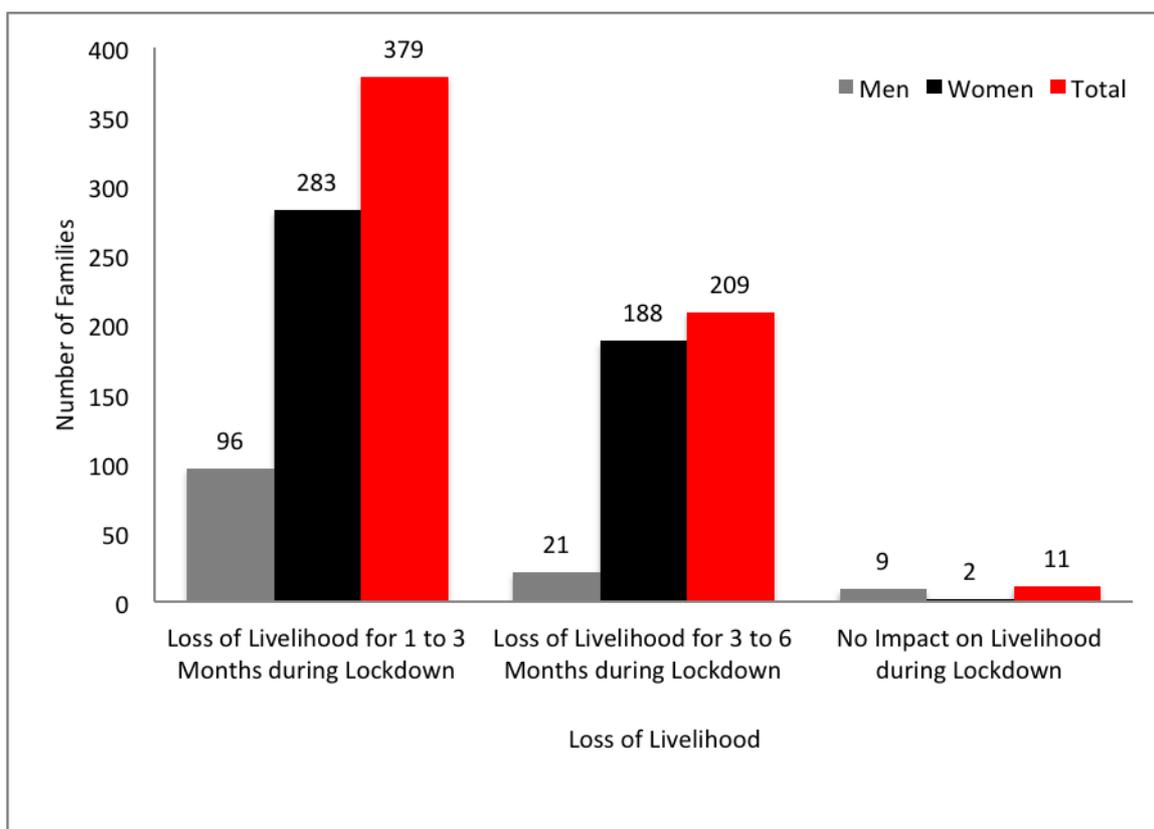
As most of the employed individuals in Perumbakkam are engaged in the informal sector, ‘work from home’ was not possible, as their work demanded physical labour. This study reveals that of the 599 individuals who were employed at the site, 379 individuals lost their livelihoods for one to three months during the lockdown period and 209 individuals lost their livelihoods for a period of three to six months. Only 11 people stated that they did not lose their livelihoods during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Discussions with communities reveal that women employed as domestic workers and those involved in vending were the worst affected. They pointed out that their families were able to survive only because of relief provided through ration shops by the Government of Tamil Nadu. They stated that families had no access to vegetables and milk because of the complete loss of income. With schools closed and children having no

access to the mid-day meal scheme, children were not able to eat vegetables and eggs that used to be provided in schools. This greatly affected their nutrition.

People also pointed out that relief was provided for domestic workers and vendors only through the Labour Welfare Boards. However, as most of them are not members of these boards, they did not receive the sanctioned relief amount of Rs 1,000. Discussions also revealed that no formal announcement was made by the Government of Tamil Nadu regarding the extension of payment for rent and maintenance fee for houses for the months of May, June, and July 2020. The state government had made a formal announcement regarding extension of dates for payment of rent/loans for the houses constructed only by the Tamil Nadu Housing Board (TNHB); TNSCB was not included in the announcement. As there was no formal announcement regarding extension of dates for payment of rent for TNSCB tenements, people in the resettlement sites were worried about payment of rent, especially in the absence of any income.

**Image 13: Loss of Livelihood During the COVID-19 Lockdown Period**



## IV. Recommendations

Information and Resource Centre for the Deprived Urban Communities and Housing and Land Rights Network jointly propose the following recommendations, related to the right of work and livelihood issues in Perumbakkam, to the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board:

- Conduct a detailed survey across the site of Perumbakkam to identify individuals who lost their livelihoods after resettlement, and ensure their access to state livelihood schemes and restoration support.
- Ensure that livelihood support is provided to the most marginalized and vulnerable groups, including women-headed households, persons with disabilities, and older persons, on a priority basis.
- As many men and women relied on vending in markets for their livelihoods, TNSCB should coordinate with the Local Panchayat to establish market spaces for all vendors.
- Along with the District Administration of Chengalpattu, TNSCB should draft a comprehensive plan of action to restore livelihoods of the resettled families, ensure access to education for all children, and improve the quality of and access to social and civil infrastructure facilities at the site.
- Set up a local grievance redress centre, as most of the individuals interviewed stated that they did not know whom to approach for availing livelihood schemes. Such a centre should provide adequate information about schemes and other infrastructure-related issues. The government should conduct an extensive information campaign on the local grievance redress centre through the residents' welfare associations and NGOs working in the settlement.
- Work to ensure that all human rights of resettled families are protected and that they are able to live with dignity.

## V. Conclusion

In the month of January 2021, TNSCB (funded by CRRT) provided livelihood support for 228 families that includes the provision of storage freezer boxes, tricycles, tilting wet grinders, and photocopiers for 393 families; another 228 families have been identified for the 'second phase' of livelihood support.<sup>15</sup> However, according to this study, 48 per cent of the survey respondents lost their livelihoods after relocation and are still unemployed.

The failure to conduct a detailed social impact assessment before relocation poses a challenge for the restoration of livelihoods of the resettled families. The absence of comprehensive data on the work profile of families prior to relocation – which is crucial for planning any livelihood restoration programme – further compounds the problem.

While families resettled in Perumbakkam continue to suffer from the prolonged adverse impacts of relocation on their human rights to work/livelihood, adequate housing, health, and education, the pandemic-induced lockdown has further exacerbated their existing vulnerabilities.

During December 2020, Perumbakkam and the adjoining relocation site of Semmenchery were flooded and had no electricity for over three days, resulting in increased hardships for residents.

Environmental experts have pointed out that, “Perumbakkam and Semmenchery are both extensions of the Pallikaranai marshland. They are at or below sea level and have a colloidal profile. They are vulnerable (to flooding) by their character.”<sup>16</sup>

Despite the fact that many civil society organizations and the media have highlighted gross violations of human rights in Perumbakkam, the plan for expanding the site was approved and inaugurated by the Prime Minister of India on 2 January 2021, under the Light House Project.<sup>17</sup> Over thousands of 'disaster-resilient' houses are to be constructed in the low-lying lands adjacent to the Perumbakkam site, unmindful of the recent flooding and warning of environmental experts. These houses are being constructed for families living near water bodies in Chennai District.

Information and Resource Centre for the Deprived Urban Communities and Housing and Land Rights Network oppose the proposal of the Government of Tamil Nadu to evict 21,334 families residing on the banks of Buckingham Canal and the Adyar and Cooum River drains, under the project to be implemented by CRRT. Government Order Number 419, issued by the Municipal Administration and Water Supply Department, dated 3 December, 2020, that approves this project also mentions that, “Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board needs to undertake a detailed survey of Project Affected Families which is proposed under the World Bank assisted project Tamil Nadu Housing and Habitat Development for Urban Poor.”

Despite the fact that various studies have highlighted the gross violations of human rights of the resettled families, the state government is planning more evictions unmindful of the

adverse short and long-term impacts on the lives of the poor. Projects that include forced eviction and relocation of the poor to inadequate sites on the fringes of the city violate human rights of the affected families. The Government of Tamil Nadu should stop forced evictions of the urban poor in the guise of 'water body restoration' and instead work in close collaboration with affected communities to provide *in situ* upgrading of housing and uphold everyone's equal 'right to the city', including their human rights to adequate housing, work, health, education, food, water, sanitation, security, privacy, and information, so that all residents of Chennai can live in safety and dignity.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Kannagi Nagar and Semmenchery are massive housing programmes initiated by the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board to resettle residents of informal settlements living in “objectionable locations” in Chennai. Earlier these settlements were located in Kanchipuram District and after the expansion of the Corporation of Chennai they are now located in Zone XIV of the Corporation of Chennai.

<sup>2</sup> Minutes of the meeting held by the Chief Secretary to the Government, in the Chief Secretary’s Conference Hall, at 3:30 p.m. on 1.03.2010. The meeting was about infrastructure facilities to be provided by TNSCB in Okkiyum Thoraipakkam, Semmenchery, and Perumbakkam.

<sup>3</sup> A crore is a unit in the South Asian numbering system that is equal to 10 million. The Indian Rupee (INR) is written as Rs.

<sup>4</sup> Policy Note 2013–2014, Housing and Urban Development Department, Government of Tamil Nadu. Available at: [http://cms.tn.gov.in/sites/default/files/documents/housing\\_5.pdf](http://cms.tn.gov.in/sites/default/files/documents/housing_5.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> *Forced to the Fringes: Disasters of ‘Resettlement’ in India*, Report 2, Kannagi Nagar, Housing and Land Rights Network, New Delhi, 2014. Available at:

[http://hlrn.org.in/documents/Kannagi\\_Nagar\\_Report\\_2.pdf](http://hlrn.org.in/documents/Kannagi_Nagar_Report_2.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Demand No. 26, Housing and Urban Development Department, Policy Note 2014–2015, Government of Tamil Nadu, December 2016. Available at:

[http://cms.tn.gov.in/sites/default/files/go/Test\\_housing\\_urban\\_d26\\_e\\_2014-15.pdf](http://cms.tn.gov.in/sites/default/files/go/Test_housing_urban_d26_e_2014-15.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India, General and Social Sector for the year ended March 2014, Government of Tamil Nadu, Report Number 3 of 2015. Available at:

[https://www.cag.org.in/sites/default/files/database/CAG%20Report\\_TNSCB\\_0.pdf](https://www.cag.org.in/sites/default/files/database/CAG%20Report_TNSCB_0.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> *From Deluge to Displacement: The Impact of Post-flood Evictions and Resettlement in Chennai*, Information and Resource Centre for the Deprived Urban Communities and Housing and Land Rights Network, New Delhi, 2017. Available at:

[https://hlrn.org.in/documents/Deluge\\_to\\_Displacement\\_Chennai.pdf](https://hlrn.org.in/documents/Deluge_to_Displacement_Chennai.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> *Rapid Assessment on Access to the Resettlement and Rehabilitation (R&R) Package in Perumbakkam*, Information and Resource Centre for the Deprived Urban Communities, and Housing and Land Rights Network, Chennai, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Information and Resource Centre for the Deprived Urban Communities (IRCDUC) is a community-centric information hub for the deprived urban communities. The Centre seeks to collect, collate, and disseminate information about various government laws, policies, and schemes that are instrumental in ensuring adequate housing for deprived urban communities: <https://ircduc.org/>

<sup>11</sup> Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN)—based in New Delhi—works for the recognition, defence, promotion, and realization of the human rights to adequate housing and land, which involve gaining a safe and secure place for all individuals and communities, especially the most marginalized, to live in peace and dignity: <https://www.hlrn.org.in/>

<sup>12</sup> Article 11.1 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) guarantees the human right to adequate housing. The human right to adequate housing is further elaborated by the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) in its General Comment 4, ‘The right to adequate housing’, 1991.

<sup>13</sup> General Comment Number 4: ‘The right to adequate housing,’ United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1991, Available at:

[https://www.hlrn.org.in/documents/CESCR\\_General\\_Comment\\_4.pdf](https://www.hlrn.org.in/documents/CESCR_General_Comment_4.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> The United Nations Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-based Evictions and Displacement were formally adopted in December 2007 by the United Nations Human Rights Council. They were presented in the 2007 report of the UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, and were developed with the objective to assist states and the international community in developing policies and legislation to address forced evictions. Available at:

[http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Housing/Guidelines\\_en.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Housing/Guidelines_en.pdf)

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<sup>15</sup> 'Resettled families get appliances by Chennai Rivers Restoration Trust,' *The New Indian Express*, 11 January 2021. Available at: <https://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/chennai/2021/jan/11/resettled-families-get-appliancesby-chennai-rivers-restoration-trust-2248326.html>

<sup>16</sup> 'As water drains out, resettled Chennai slum-dwellers recall dark nights,' *The New Indian Express*, 29 November 2020. Available at: <https://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/chennai/2020/nov/29/as-water-drains-out-resettled-chennai-slum-dwellers-recall-dark-nights-2229442.html>

<sup>17</sup> 'PM Modi just promised Perumbakkam 1000+ new houses. Who will solve the woes of the existing ones?', *Citizen Matters*, 13 January 2020. Available at: <https://chennai.citizenmatters.in/chennai-perumbakkam-resettlement-light-house-project-23160>