



HOUSING AND LAND RIGHTS NETWORK (HLRN)

PRESS RELEASE

New Publication Reveals Human Rights Violations of the Resettlement Process in Delhi, Chennai and Mumbai

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Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN), in collaboration with its partners, launched a publication titled, ***Forced to the Fringes: Disasters of 'Resettlement' in India***, which consists of a human rights assessment of three large resettlement sites: Savda Ghevra, Delhi; Kannagi Nagar, Chennai; and, Vashi Naka, Mumbai. The publication was released, at a press conference in Delhi, by affected persons, authors of the study, independent experts, academics, and human rights defenders from different parts of the country.

For this study, HLRN collaborated with Information and Resource Centre for the Deprived Urban Communities (IRCDUC) in Chennai; Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA) in Mumbai; and, Society for Participatory Integrated Development (SPID) in Delhi. The study uses the human rights framework to analyse housing and living conditions in the resettlement sites as well as the eviction process that preceded relocation of affected families in the three cities.

The study finds that the eviction and relocation process in Mumbai, Chennai and Delhi, was carried out without adherence to due process and in contravention of international norms, including the UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-based Evictions and Displacement. No investigation, however, has been initiated against any of the state officials responsible for acts of demolition, force, violence and destruction.

In all three resettlement sites—Savda Ghevra, Kannagi Nagar, and Vashi Naka—the government and concerned agencies have violated the residents' human rights to adequate housing, land, work/livelihood, health, education, food, water, security of the person and home, participation and information. The governments in all three cities have also breached national and international laws, policies and standards related to housing, evictions and resettlement. None of the affected persons have access to remedies for the human rights violations suffered; neither has the government provided any reparation in the form of adequate compensation, rehabilitation and return, where possible. The entire resettlement process has ignored the indivisibility of human rights as well as the vital link between housing, livelihood and other human rights. The living conditions in the three sites are grossly inadequate, and the residents are still struggling for basic services, including water, sanitation, transport, electricity and access to healthcare, education, work and food. Across the sites, residents reported a deterioration in their standard of living after relocation. Women and children have suffered disproportionately from the impacts of eviction and inadequate resettlement. Many women lost their livelihoods and a large number of children have been forced to drop out of school. Safety and security are serious concerns; acts of violence against women and girls have been reported at all three sites.

Umesh Gupta and Shahid, residents of Savda Ghevra, recounted the difficult living conditions at the remote site, including the lack of water, and the adverse impacts that resettlement has had on their lives and livelihoods.

The three-city study highlights not just the travesty of resettlement in urban India, but also exposes the exclusionary and discriminatory policies of the state. An alarming finding of the study is that a large percentage of evicted families were not resettled by the state on grounds of

'ineligibility.' This results in increased homelessness and further impoverishment of already marginalised urban communities.

Vanessa Peter from IRCDUC, Chennai, while discussing the policy gaps related to resettlement in Tamil Nadu said, "The Government of Tamil Nadu has acknowledged the persistence of various problems in the large-scale resettlement colonies. Yet it is keen on replicating the 'failed model' and forcing the deprived urban communities to accept these houses. Despite having set up a high level committee in the year 2011 to address issues in the existing resettlement sites and to formulate a policy, till date, there is no clear-cut, common policy or guidelines at the state-level governing the rehabilitation and resettlement practices of the Government of Tamil Nadu."

Simpreet Singh from Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA) and Tata Institute for Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai, claimed that, "During the last decade, a large number of urban poor residents have been evicted from their homes and places of livelihood in the name of 'development' and transformation of the city of Mumbai. They have been relocated to sites where their lives have further deteriorated. Thus, the urban poor are being made to pay the cost of development of the city."

Amita Bhide, Professor and Chairperson, Centre for Urban Planning, Policy and Governance, TISS, added that, "With an enhanced emphasis on infrastructure-led urban development, resettlement has become a common phenomenon in Indian cities of varying scales. Urban resettlement is one of the most neglected issues in public policy and has been characterised by arbitrariness subject to local land dynamics. There is an urgent need to adopt a more sensitive and humane approach to the issue of resettlement, which first involves displacement and hence an immense impact on human life and resources."

Shivani Chaudhry, Executive Director, HLRN, strongly condemned the eviction and 'resettlement' process that is now ubiquitous across India. She stated that, "This paradigm of urban development is nothing less than a systemic apartheid against the working poor. The government's insidious agenda of creating 'slum free' and 'world class' cities, not only exacerbates inequality and poverty but denies the city's economically weaker sections their constitutional rights as equal citizens of the country. Resettlement, the way it is being carried out in India, is nothing but a euphemism for the planned segregation and dispossession of the urban poor."

The publication presents recommendations to the respective state governments and the central government to ameliorate living conditions at the three sites, and to adopt a human rights framework for urban development, planning, housing, resettlement and rehabilitation. It calls for abolishing tools of exclusion, such as 'cut-off' dates and other 'eligibility' criteria, which deny the urban poor their rights and entitlements. There is a need for a human rights-based national housing legislation, which complies with the Constitution of India and international human rights law. The state must protect everyone's 'right to the city', which is the equal right of all residents to participate in the development of the city and to an equal share of its benefits and spaces. HLRN and its partners hope that the government, at both the state and central level, will consider the recommendations provided in this study, and will work towards improving housing and living conditions across the country, and in developing an alternative, human rights-based paradigm of urbanisation that enables the creation of inclusive, democratic, safe, and equitable cities.

The publication, *Forced to the Fringes: Disasters of 'Resettlement' in India*, is at: www.hic-sarp.org

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