

Housing For All

EWS and Slum Dwellers in Metros

A Case for the Shelterless in Delhi

National Agenda of Governance and 'Housing for All'

National Agenda of Governance (NAG) has identified '**Housing for All**', both in **urban and rural sectors**, as a priority area with particular emphasis on the needs of the vulnerable groups. Although, shelters or housing for the **Economically Weaker Sections (EWSs)**, **Low Income Groups (LIGs)**, **slum dwellers** and **shelterless** may be a common concern in both these sectors alike, the problems of the homeless are more acutely pronounced in the urban sector, particularly in the wake of **large scale migration** and the phenomena of **rural-urban transition**.

More than one-fourth of India's population (**28%**) **inhabiting nearly 5161 urban centers** already being in the cities, by **2021, 40% of the population** is projected to be in these areas. The outcry for Good Urban Governance with policy emphasis on productivity, environment, community health, quality of life, equity and poverty alleviation is extremely well placed since nearly **2/3rd of the national income** is generated in the cities with **sizable work force** being employed to create goods and services for India's fast growing economy. For those who are primarily responsible to run these 'engines of growth' there are very little space and infrastructure facilities created in terms of shelters with concomitant human rights. This also explains a perceptible **shift in the policy**, the substitution of mass forced evictions and confrontations by **negotiations and participation, in situ slums development**, provision of better **infrastructure and habitable** living conditions etc.

The Union Government is responsible for the formulation of a policy with regard to programs and approaches for effective implementation of social housing schemes, particularly those pertaining to the weaker sections of the society. The **Housing and Habitat Policy 1998** has been drafted to address the issues relating to **sustainable development, infrastructure and strong public-private partnership** for shelters, in pursuance of the said NAG. It was proposed to facilitate construction of **20 lakh additional units every year**, with emphasis on EWSs and LIGs of the population as also to cater to the needs of SC/ST and other vulnerable groups. **Working Group on Housing** has clearly mentioned that **90% of housing shortage is for EWS and LIG**, HUDCO's 55% of the allocation is being for these segments. For unexplained reasons, the shelter needs of the most vulnerable and deprived among them, the homeless, hasn't been assigned the priority it deserves in the national policies and programs.

Pro-poor Policies for Shelter & Sanitation Needs

Apart from above-mentioned provisions of the **NAG** and the **Habitat Policy 1998**, there are multiple pro-poor policies and programs. They include, National Slum Development Program, Yamuna Action Plan, Indira Awas Yozana, 10th Plan Approach for urban poor and marginalised, SJSRY, VAMBAY & Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan and, last but not least, the half hearted HUDCO's **Scheme of Shelter and Sanitation of Footpath Dwellers**. Even international commitments, such as, Habitat Agenda, 1996 and Istanbul Declaration have not been put into action, though ratified. It may be seen that except for the **Scheme for The Shelter And Sanitation For**

Footpath Dwellers, having very limited coverage, there is hardly anything for the shelterless under the government's program for these poorest among the poor.

Magnitude of homelessness

Although, there is practically no estimate of the shelterless people even in the capital city of India, there have been several authentic parameters on which the shelterless population can be estimated. Enumeration of homeless population becomes difficult in the absence of any fixed abode (sans domicile fixe), identity or address. For the first time in **1991 Census of India**, in its gross under-enumeration of '**houseless population**' could find only **2,007,489** such people in the country. At the city levels, several estimations have since been made. **52,765 homeless** were counted during a study conducted by **Ashray Adhikar Abhiyan (AAA)** and other organizations together in June 2000, that is, those who were living or sleeping on the streets, in parks, or such other open places, not fit for human habitation. It excluded the people sleeping in the Night Shelters. In a recent survey conducted in March 2003, **25 concentration areas** have been identified in the different parts of Delhi. Another NGO, **Lokayan's study** on the **rickshaw pullers** indicated that 22 % of the **4 lakh rickshaw pullers in Delhi** are homeless. Even DDA admits of at least 1% of the population is being homeless, i.e 1.4 lakh homeless in Delhi's 14 million populations. Our surveys and estimates, however, account for nearly **1 lakh people as homeless in Delhi alone**.

For the first time, Census 2001 has brought out a figure of **13 million 'houseless households'**, each household accounting for 5-6 members, the **total population of such houseless** (or shelterless) being at least **6.5 crores** in the country. This is a mind boggling figure casting an extremely onerous responsibility on the government, the housing related agencies and the civil society.

Odd and shifting habitations, migratory movements, lack of identity and absence of unanimous definition of the homeless are some of the factors that make it difficult to ascertain the exact magnitude of homelessness anywhere, including in Delhi. The issue being directly related to poverty and destitution, the numbers are in crores, as is being estimated. The deprived children, the helpless aged, women, men, disabled and even the migrant population afflicted by famine, drought and natural calamities who suffer hunger and deprivations, inhabit the endless number of villages, towns to bigger cities and the metropolises like Delhi.

Delhi for Change: An action-based study project on Delhi's Homeless

Associated with the national governance and the city policing for the past 29 years, such issues were not of direct concern to me except in the context of the problems relating to slums and unauthorised habitations, their removals and the routine, albeit callous, legal and administrative treatment given to them and to the shelterless, who are targeted for action as '**public nuisance**'. However, my association with **Prayas Juvenile Aid Center Society**, an organisation for neglected and delinquent children, during the past 15 years, provided me insights into the problems of the poor people in urban areas, particularly street and working children, their socio-economic and legal protection, their education, training and rehabilitation. It also led me to understand the problems of destitution, most acutely felt, experienced and suffered by the children for whom Prayas has created multiple programs.

A **workshop** had been organized on 19 Nov.1999 in the **Planning Commission** under the Chairmanship of the Secretary to deliberate on the issues relating to shelterless poor, street children, migrant labourers, pavement dwellers etc. in Delhi and to formulate an action plan. I happened to participate as a police officer and as Secretary, Prayas to discuss the problems relating to the homeless in the city of Delhi. Aashray Adhikar Abhiyan (AAA), a project for the homeless, supported by Action Aid India emerging from this above-mentioned Planning Commission meeting, was joined by several organisations, including Prayas, to further look into the problems of the homeless. The campaign spearheaded by AAA has gone on since then.

Clinching the penultimate opportunity to directly experience the state of governance, with the most vulnerable among the urban poor, I am now availing of my study leave from Delhi Police to take up this **action-based study project Delhi for Change, supported by Action Aid India** on the issue of urban homelessness. It visualized a more just, humane and caring city in which the poor and homeless, marginalized women, men and children can live a life of dignity, taking support from the government and the larger civil society on a sustainable basis. We are working towards evolving a **policy for the homeless and an action plan to create shelters and space for them**, policies and programmes for their rehabilitation and initiate the process of implementation.

During the past one year, I have certainly gathered a fair understanding of the problems of the homeless and marginalised in the context of their acknowledged shelter rights. In the first phase of my study project, I began to interact with the homeless, on the streets, in the shelters, wherever they were, while simultaneously collecting the documents or published materials on the subject. Much to my surprise, homelessness, one of the gravest human tragedies in civilized society, is ignored in most of the accounts.

Delhi Experiment: Joint Apex Committee for Improvement of Shelters and Facilities for Street Children

A Public Interest Litigation (PIL) was filed by AAA in the High Court of Delhi to improve the conditions of the night shelters and to enhance the capacity and facilities. Though the matter was being discussed in the court, we decided to bring the parties together to cooperate on the issue, with due assent from the Court. A **Joint Apex Committee** was thus constituted in the Slum & Resettlement Wing of MCD. This committee with AAA (Action Aid India) as a key member, later joined by some leading NGOs like Sulabh International, Prayas, Child Watch India, Butterflies etc besides drawing individuals from all sections of the society—Ministers, bureaucrats, social leaders, councilors, representatives from NGOs/ Associations, municipal bodies, corporates, businessmen, academicians and journalists, residents and traders associations, students and volunteers, who have kept attending the proceedings. JAC has now become a **model of Govt.-NGOs partnership**, meeting every Thursday at India Habitat Center, Core 6A, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Center, MCD, Lodhi Road to discuss, decide and then ensure the implementation.

As mentioned earlier, about 1,00,000 homeless people have been vaguely identified so far through surveys, whereas only **1750 are accommodated in the existing 12 Raen Baseras (Night Shelters)** run by the Slum & Resettlement Wing, MCD. So the obvious course of action

has been to create more space for the homeless people. Creating more shelters is a long drawn process with multiple requirements of land, buildings/ infrastructure, staffing, provisions like blankets, durries and program related running cost etc., also involving a lot of political and administrative will. Another option was to create **temporary shelters** or makeshift arrangements, at least during the winter, particularly considering the cold and the consequent casualty. It is reported by the Delhi Police that nearly **3070 unclaimed and Unidentified Dead Bodies (UIDBs)** were found in 2002, and **this year** this figure **upto November 2003** has already reached to **2977**. It is anybody's guess who these unidentified dead bodies could be? Creating shelters, both regular and temporary, is also a measure to save such lives.

Winter and the homeless: crisis intervention strategy

Winter being the most difficult on the streets, homeless turn towards any kind of space and shelters. The Delhi administration used to set up temporary shelters for such shelterless people. However, it was discontinued for some reasons. In **winter 2001-02**, there were some tents pitched up. In **winter 2002-03**, JAC played a major role in setting up temporary shelters. About **24 such shelters** were created, accommodating about **4000 people**. The Slum & JJ, MCD was requested to open some of its Community Centers (lying vacant or underutilized in the proximity of the homeless concentration areas) for shelter purposes. Altogether, 24 temporary shelters were created, including some in **schools and college, Gurudwara, temples**, etc. With the optimum space for about 350 people, **5 Community Centers**, which were lying in disuse and had become centers of illegal activities, are now sheltering more than their stated capacity. The homeless people have not only found the sleeping space, toilet, bath, water, electricity as the basic minimum facilities for a shelter, but they also benefit through multiple activities being conducted by the respective NGOs at these places. It has led to various rehabilitative services for the shelterless.

This year again, we have come up with a **plan to set up about 35 temporary shelters** in unutilized MCD buildings and in tents being pitched up by the Dy. Commissioners as relief measures, with the help of NGOs and, most importantly, **100 youth volunteers**. Health services by the **Directorate of Health Services, GNCTD** is to be provided again in all the shelters.

Formulating policy in Delhi's and at national level

A **high level meeting** in Delhi Govt Secretariat attended by the Divisional Commissioner, GNCTD, Commissioner, MCD, Addl. Commissioner, Slum & JJ Dept, MCD and others, chaired by the Chief Secretary Ms. Shailja Chandra, reviewed the homeless situation in Delhi and related problems. This is now leading to a comprehensive policy on the shelterless in Delhi associating different departments of the government, the municipal bodies in which a special role is being found for the Joint Apex Committee.

In this context, **Delhi Master Plan 2021**, now being formulated, is also being influenced by us to provide space for the marginalised and homeless in Delhi. Although, the shelter has been very beautifully defined in the Master Plan of Delhi 1991, giving due importance to **socio-economic compatibility, livelihood, education, health and other priority areas**, in the context of the EWS/ LIG but in terms of actual space and facilities, it remains untranslated on the ground. The presentations made before the VC and senior DDA officials created an impact, but in the policy

guidelines announced at political levels, the land/ infrastructure for the homeless is yet to find a space.

In any scheme of housing for the poorest among the poor, there is an urgent need to integrate space in city short and long terms planning processes along with the allied services like health and sanitation, training and education, counseling and rehabilitation. The model of '**Govt.-NGOs-Corporate partnership**', in which **government allocates space/ sits/ infrastructure** along with its maintenance, **NGOs provide the management and rehabilitation services**, and corporates the requisite financial support, could be the basis of such a policy in the broader framework of **private-public partnership**.

The only existing scheme in India operated through the **Dept. of Urban Employment and Poverty Alleviation, GOI, Scheme for shelter and sanitation for footpath dwellers**, has so far undertaken 114 projects throughout the country with coverage of nearly 17000 beds for the homeless, on an expenditure of Rs. 8.6 crores. The Govt. of Delhi has so far chosen not to avail this scheme for itself, and generally remain limited to its local funds to construct and run the Raen Baseras. This scheme, in any case, was deficient in many ways and not inclusive of the NGOs participation. The **Revised scheme for shelter and sanitation for shelterless** being formulated by the Ministry of Urban Development & Poverty Alleviation, proposes to provide subsidy for 80% of the night shelter project cost, with interesting features like land/ sites/ infrastructure by ULBs, NGOs/ CBOs to implement and manage the shelters, and provide minimum standards for designs, costing etc. by HUDCO.

Need and relevance for policy and programs for shelterless

In the context of marginalized and vulnerable urban poor, a vast number of people live in Delhi without shelter, basic facilities and amenities for existence and adequate means of livelihood. According to the Delhi Development Authority and Municipal Corporation of Delhi, over **40,00,000 people live in 80,000 Jhuggi-jhopadi units, 15 lakh are living in resettlement colonies**. Adding the population of unauthorized colonies as estimated about 35 lakh, we are left with only **29% people in city's 14 million population** who are supposedly legally authorized to live in this city. Incidentally, as per the official documents, out of 70,000 **hectares of land** available under the Master Plan 1991, only **4000 hectares** is said to be **occupied by the slum & JJ clusters** who constitute nearly **29% of city's population**.

For a realistic and truly holistic **city planning**, the **requirements of slums, unauthorised colonies**, the homeless, hawkers, vendors, rickshaw pullers, construction workers and other forms of unorganized labour (who form 93% of the working class in the country) besides the **special needs** of the disadvantaged groups like children, women, disabled, and uncared elders, must be taken into consideration with action plans and implementable schemes. Such a process will be entirely in conformity with the **government's pronounced policies** and will create truly **inclusive governance** in the country.