

# CHRONIC POVERTY IN INDIA

*Issues, Policies and Challenges*

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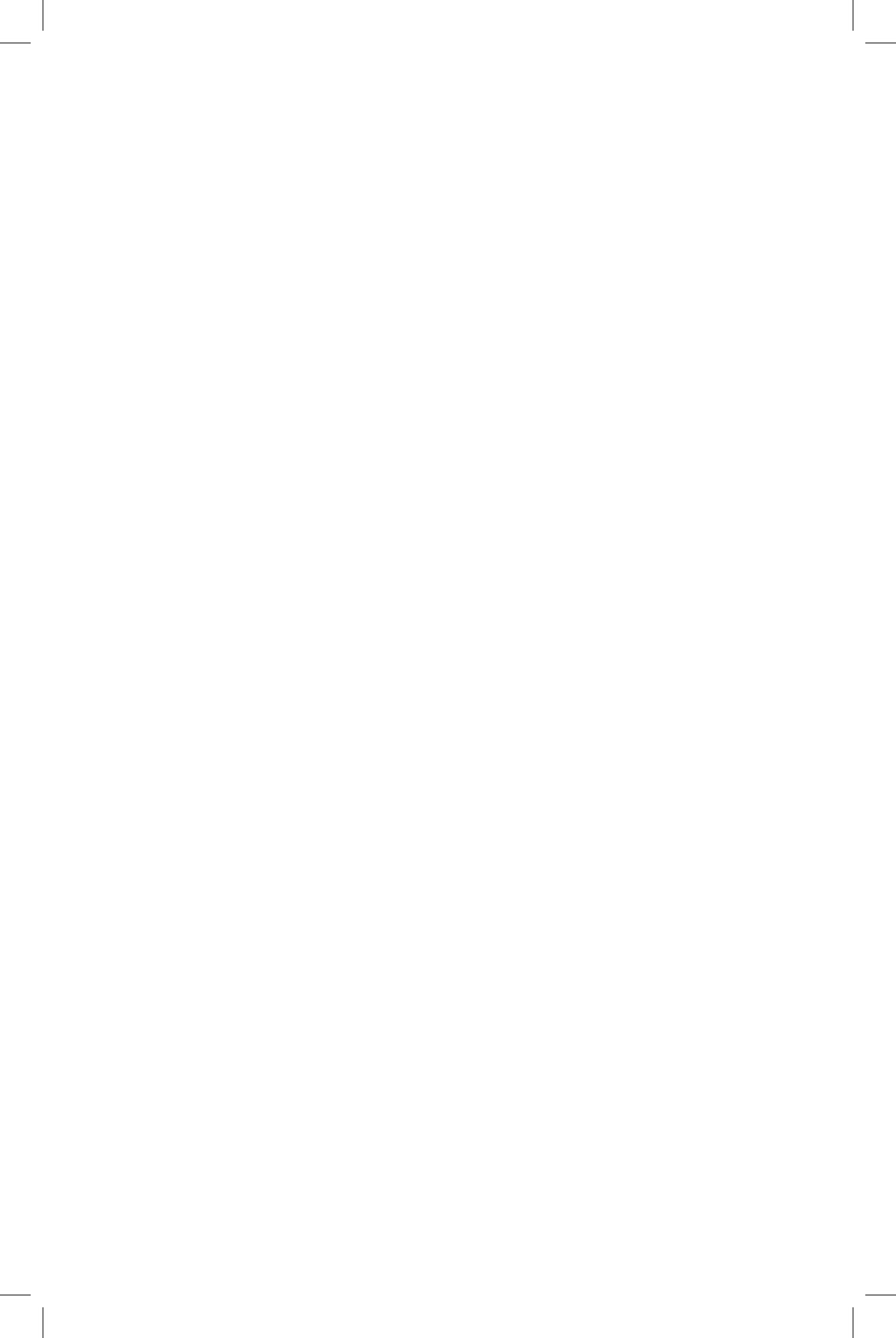
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*Dedicated to the Millions of Indians  
entrapped in chronic poverty*



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# Mapping the Plight of the Urban Poor in the era of LPG

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— Sumedha Dutta

THE WORLD is facing an unprecedented amount of urbanisation today. The rate of urban growth is also found to be accelerating in the case of India. The 2011 Census data reveals that since Independence, it is the first recorded instance wherein the absolute increase in population has been more in urban areas than that in rural areas, with the level of urbanisation increasing from 27.81 per cent to 31.16 per cent within the census period of 2001 to 2011. Besides, all predictions indicate that the urban population growth rate will be significantly high in the coming decade and hence a proper sustainable planning for urban development is the need of the hour. This is in view of the fact that with growing urban population, problems in urban areas are also becoming manifold that pose a great challenge to human development as well as to the development of the country on the whole.

Recent experiences reveal that urban areas are facing many new challenges in issues pertaining to housing, management of local

governance, managing public and private responsibility, etc. These problems are becoming all the more manifest under the present drive towards increasing Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation (LPG). In this context, the plight of the urban poor, the most vulnerable section of the populace, needs special attention from the policy framers, as there is widespread negligence towards this issue of urban poverty, in contrast to the considerable attention that is generally woven around the notion of rural poverty. This is in view of the fact that urban poverty in India has been very widespread so much so that in 2004-2005, of the estimated total urban population of 309.5 million people, 80.8 million were below the poverty line, since their monthly consumption was less than Rs 538.6. This, in itself, is a formidable number, as it constitutes a major chunk of the world's total urban poor, which in 2004-2005 was estimated to be Rs 291.4 million (Planning Commission 2011).

### **'Undercounting' Urban Poor**

It is a known fact that a large percentage of the urban poor are those who are involved in the 'informal economy', or those who belong to the 'self-employed' category. Most of those who make up the so-called informal economy consist of seasonal migrants or the distress migrants, the landless agricultural workers who are trying to avoid seasonal starvation by looking for work in the cities, owing to dependence on mono-cropping and lack of non-farm opportunities in the rural areas. They end up in the trap of the so-called informal economy, working in inhumane conditions, without the slightest social security benefits, having no protection against dismissal on arbitrary grounds or even against accidents and other risks. They also remain outside any financial inclusion efforts or the delivery of banking services at affordable cost (India: Urban Poverty Report, 2009). They are mostly chronically poor and some are so poor that they require advance payment, leading them into the trap of what Breman in his study

of the informal sector in Gujarat, terms as 'neo-bondage' (Breman 2013). Again, the category of self-employment is often found to imply nothing but wage labour on extremely oppressive terms, and it usually includes vulnerable groups such as rickshaw pullers, street vendors, sex workers, debt-ridden small stall holders and home-based workers (Breman 2013). One may also include the very vulnerable group of domestic helpers in this category.

The Alternative Survey Group (2004) observes that liberalisation as a development policy is magnifying 'mal-development', highlighting the fall in India's Human Development Index (HDI) ranking from 124 in the year 2000 to 126 in 2004 (which had dropped to a dismal 135 out of 187 countries, according to the Human Development Report of 2013); causing structural imbalances and institutional distortions, thereby resulting in the transformation of the political economy which is, in turn, disempowering the masses. The economic reforms have given a boost to the corporate sector while pauperising the masses, which is apparent from the fact that since the reforms only 36 billionaires possess wealth equivalent to one quarter of the country's GDP, and the annual pay of the top eight corporate executives is between Rs 10 crore to Rs 25.5 crore, while the average wage rate for the women casual workers is only Rs 34.51 and for the male adults Rs 51.2 (Kumar 2011).

The irony that India's economic boom, in the first decade of the 21st century, has actually been accompanied by an increase in the magnitude of absolute poverty also finds reflection in the observations of Prof Prabhat Patnaik. He analysed that although the Planning Commission has been claiming a reduction in the poverty rates for both rural and urban areas, in terms of its own definition of poverty, that is those getting less than 2,100 calories per day in urban areas, and less than 2,400 calories in rural areas, the percentage of people below the poverty line had actually increased during the period of 'high growth rate'. Thus, according to the National Sample Survey (NSS)

data of 2009–2010, as much as 73 per cent of the urban population had access to less than 2,100 calories per day, which has increased from 64 per cent in 2004–2005, and 57 per cent in 1993–1994, while the figure for 1983–84 was 58.5 per cent (The Hindu 2013 a).

The NSS survey also reveals that while the urban poverty gap, which is defined as the depth of urban poverty measured as the aggregate poverty deficit of the poor in relation to the poverty line, has come down over the years, it continues to be deep as compared to rural areas. These controversies regarding the extent of urban poverty bring to light the problem of ‘undercounting the poor in cities’. The escalating restrictions pertaining to access and claim to urban space and resources, in India, have been found to generate tensions between the advantages of being ‘seen, counted and served’ as urban residents on the one hand, and the threats of being exposed to the ‘regulatory eye of the urban state’ on the other (Coelho and Maringanti 2012).

Again, the gap between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’ appear to have widened since the reforms, while urban poverty like its rural counterpart has been socially and economically concentrated. Thus, while the percentage increase in the Monthly Per Capita Expenditure (MPCE) in the lower MPCE classes was less than 10 per cent between 1993–94 and 2004–05, over the same period, the higher MPCE classes recorded an increase of more than 15 per cent (Planning Commission 2011). Similarly, using the NSS All-India Debt and Investment Survey, Jayadev et al (2011) illustrate how during 1991–2002, the median wealth of the urban elite was much higher and also grew much faster as compared to that of the middle classes and manual workers, thereby signalling a skewed and unequal growth since the reforms. Studies also reveal a caste-class congruence even with regard to urban poverty, as using data from the same survey, Zacharias and Vakulabharanam (2011) demonstrate how the urban scheduled castes rank the lowest in terms of the urban wealth index, while the urban scheduled tribes

have a marginally higher median wealth, followed by the OBCs and non-Hindus, whereas the upper caste Hindus were found to be almost like an urban wealth enclave. The 2001 Census data had also revealed a higher proportion of Scheduled Castes (17.4%), in slums, as against non-slum settlements. Again, urban poverty levels among the Muslims have been found to be much higher than that of the Hindus. In this context, the Prime Minister's High-Level Committee (2006) or the Sachar Committee report had pointed out that, as compared to the National average, urban Muslims are substantially under-represented in the formal sector, as they are mostly engaged in the unorganised sector of the economy which rarely enjoys protection of any kind, thereby making them very much more vulnerable to the negative impacts of liberalisation (Kumar 2011).

It is noteworthy that although the issue of poverty has been given significant importance in the Five Year Plans, the focus was mostly on rural poverty from the First Five Year Plan to the Sixth Five Year Plan. However since the Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-1990), there appears to have been a visible effort at addressing the concerns of urban poverty by focussing on infrastructure, environmental improvement and livelihood promotion. Nevertheless, the fact remains that despite the persistent rise in the budgetary allocations for urban development and alleviation of urban poverty, it remains considerably low as compared to those made for rural India, as has been the case in the earlier plan periods. The data since 2009 may be observed in table 1.

Thus, it is ironic that while the contribution of the urban areas to the country's GDP is two-third of the total, and nearly 25 per cent of this is contributed by the urban poor, yet resources for the alleviation of their problems is not even 2 per cent of the GDP (The Hindu 2013 b).

### **'Slum-centric' Policies of Urban Poverty**

Urban development, including urban poverty alleviation, is a state subject. However, policy support and central funding in key areas

**Table 1:** A Comparison of Budget Allocations and Estimates for Rural and Urban Development next the between 2009 to 2013-14

Figures in Rs Crore except where mentioned as % of GDP	2009-2010 Actual	2010-2011 Actual	2011-2012 Actual	2012-13 Budget Estimates	2012-13 Revised Estimates	2013-2014 Budget Estimates
Total Union Budget	1024487	1197328	1304365	1490925	1420825	1665297
GDP (at market prices)	6457352	7795314	8974947	10028118	10028118	11371886
Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation	571.59	828.2	957.1	1,163.00	957.3	1468.00
As % of Total Union Budget	0.06	0.07	0.07	0.08	0.07	0.09
As % of GDP	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Rural Development	56637.11	72109.37	66,689.20	76430.00	55052.00	80,250.50
As % of Total Union Budget	5.53	6.02	5.11	5.13	3.85	4.82
As % of GDP	0.88	0.93	0.74	0.76	0.55	0.71

**Source:** Table entitled, Priorities for Select Ministries in the Union Budget (2009-2010 to 2013-2014) computed by Saumya Srivastava and Kanika Kaul in 'Examining the priorities for different sectors in the Union Budget', in the special issue of *Yojana*, March 2013:59.

involves the contribution of the Central Government. It should be noted that there is yet no complete agreement among different political parties about the objectives of the Indian society and how they should be attained. Thus, in the Nehru era—which extends roughly from the post-Independence period until the end of the 1980s—the entire pattern of development was modelled on socialistic or welfare ideas. It is noteworthy that the framers of the constitution incorporated many provisions designed to make India a welfare State. The basic aim of a welfare state are indicated in the preamble to the constitution itself, and all of part four of the constitution relates to the Directive Principles of State Policy. Article 36 states:

‘The state shall strive to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting as effectively as it may be, a social order in which justice, social, economic and political shall inform all the institutions of the national life.’

Thus, while the first Prime Minister emphasised on infrastructure development programmes, poverty alleviation or *garibi hatao* was the key emphasis of the manifesto of the Indira Gandhi Government in the 1970s, which helped in firmly establishing its base among the poorer masses. A number of schemes were implemented during the Nehru era for the uplift of the conditions of the urban poor.

However, in the early 90s, with the motto of Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation, the role of central planning itself stands challenged and many changes have been brought about in the programmes and the administrative structures. The government has also refrained from spending generously on infrastructure-related projects, owing to the problems of cost recovery. The economy has been opened up to the global markets and the private sector is being encouraged to play a major role in the lives of the common people. Thus, in the current times, most of the anti-poverty programmes are such that the Government fund constitutes only a part of the total resources, the remaining being expected to come from institutional

sources, private entrepreneurs and the residents of the town or locality, owing to the involvement of private actors, as well as communities, apart from the local bodies. The resultant is a system wherein the agencies or people providing substantial funds also are the ones having a greater say in designing the details of the project, the delivery system and its exact location etc as they have an interest in recovering their money in a short time. Hence, automatically, the urban poor, owing to their negligible assets, if any, will have a much lesser access to power to protect their interests, in the context of having a say in the designing of the developmental schemes and programmes. Table 2 attempts at summarising the major programmes and efforts for the reduction of urban poverty and improving the access of the urban poor to basic amenities in the various Five Year Plans.

Table 2 is a modified version of, 'Evolution of programmes on urban poverty alleviation through the plan periods', in the Report of the Working Group on Urban Poverty, Slums and Service Delivery System, by the Steering Committee on Urbanisation, Planning Commission, New Delhi, 3 October 2011: 71- 72.

From this table, one may conclude that most of the recent schemes directed at urban poverty alleviation are more or less targeted at slum redevelopment or slum relocation. This highlights the implicit assumption underlying all these schemes and policies—that the lot of the urban poor are residents of urban slums. This is, despite the fact that, neither all of the urban poor live in slums, nor are all the residents of these squatter settlements poor. Thus, a project that has been carried out by Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) and Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC) in 34 cities of 11 States highlights the fact that 40 per cent of the urban poor actually live outside the slums, and yet they lack any significant identity (*The Hindu* 2013 b). The homeless and pavement dwellers among the urban poor continue to be the most vulnerable as well as the most neglected lot of the populace.

**Table 2:** Major Policies for Urban Development / Urban Poverty Alleviation

Five Year Plan/ Annual Plan	Year (s)	Major Thrust Areas/Programmes
Second Five Year Plan	1956-61	Urban Community Development (UCD) project (pilot), started in 1958, based on an area-oriented approach.
Fourth Five Year Plan	1969-74	Scheme for Environmental Improvement of Urban Slums (EIUS), launched in 1972, in order to provide basic amenities like safe drinking water supply, sewerage. Community baths and latrines, street lighting etc. to slum dwelling populations. It was transferred to the State Governments in 1974 for implementation.
Fifth Five Year Plan	1974-79	The Urban Land (Ceiling and Regulation) Act or ULCRA enacted to prevent concentration of land holding in urban areas and for the construction of houses for Lower Income Groups.
Sixth Five Year Plan	1980-85	Emphasis on integrated provision of services along with shelter particularly for the poor. Launch of Integrated Development of Small and Medium Towns (IDSMT), and initiation of Urban Basic Services in 1981 with an aim to cater to the basic physical and social needs of the urban poor with a view to improving their living conditions.
Seventh Five Year Plan	1985-90	Based on recommendations of the National Commission on Urbanisation (NCU), the following two schemes were launched: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nehru Rozgar Yojana (NRY), 1989, for employment generation/livelihood promotion</li> <li>• Urban Basic Services for the Poor (UBSP), 1990, a modified UBS programme, that envisaged fostering community structures comprising the urban poor to ensure their effective participation in their developmental activities.</li> </ul>

Five Year Plan/ Annual Plan	Year (s)	Major Thrust Areas/Programmes
Annual Plan	1990-92	The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act was passed by the Parliament that envisaged urban poverty alleviation, slum upgradation and protection of the interests of the weaker sections as amongst the functions of the Urban Local Bodies (ULBs)
Eighth Five Year Plan	1992-97	<p>Commencement of Prime Minister's Integrated Urban Poverty Eradication Programme (PMIUPEP) in 1995 with the objective of improving the quality of life of the urban poor by creating a facilitating environment through community-based planning and implementation. It incorporated within itself all the components of UBSP and NRY.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch of National Slum Development Programme (NSDP) in 1996, covering physical infrastructure like water supply, storm water drains, sewer, community latrines, widening and paving of existing lanes, street lights etc., along with social infrastructure for pre-school education, non-formal education, adult education, maternity, child health and primary healthcare including immunisation etc.</li> </ul>
Ninth Five Year Plan	1997-02	Launch of Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana (SJSRY), in 1997, after subsuming existing schemes like NRY, UBSP and PMIUPEP
Tenth Five Year Plan	2002-07	Launch of Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) a flagship programme of Government of India in 2005.

Five Year Plan/ Annual Plan	Year (s)	Major Thrust Areas/Programmes
Eleventh Five Year Plan	2007-12	<p>The Interest Subsidy Scheme for Housing the Urban Poor (ISHUP) launched in 2008 with a view to enabling the access of urban poor to the long-term institutional finance. The scheme was to be implemented in the 11th Five Year Plan as on pilot basis.</p> <p>The Unorganised Workers Social Security Act passed in 2008 that outlined social security provisions to be made by state governments for 'unorganised' workers.</p> <p>National Urban Sanitation Policy launched in 2008 which aims to transform urban India into community-driven, totally sanitised, healthy and liveable cities and towns.</p> <p>Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY), passed by the Union Cabinet in 2011, under JNNURM, with the objective of a slum-free India, with inclusive and equitable cities in which every citizen has access to basic civic and social services and a decent shelter. Willing state governments are supposed to enter into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation for undertaking reforms in a time bound manner.</p>
Twelfth Five Year Plan	2012-17	<p>Launch of National Urban Health Mission that encompasses the primary healthcare needs of the urban populations. It also seeks to address urban-centric issues such as domestic violence, sexual exploitation, HIV/AIDS, trafficking, child and drug abuse and other gender-related matters.</p>

Thus, while a survey of the homeless, in the city of Delhi, in the year 2010, commissioned by the Delhi Government and conducted by UNDP in collaboration with several NGOs, revealed that there are around 55,955 people living in the city 'without any shade or shelter' (Gupta, 2011), the NGOs claim that the figures are nowhere less than 1.5 lakh (Pandey 2012). They observed that the survey was being conducted in the year of the Commonwealth Games, whereby most of the homeless were pushed out of the city, thereby severely under presenting the numbers. The number of night shelters is nowhere close to the ideal, as the city continues to ignore its 'have-nots'. And despite such a dismal situation, it has been alleged that the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) has recommended an amendment to a clause in the Delhi Master Plan 2021 to bring down the number of night shelters from one per one lakh people to one per five lakh people, which would in turn result in bringing down the number of night shelters in the city from the present figure of 150 to a meagre 30 (The Hindu 2012).

Again, despite the launch of slum-centric urban development projects, the situation of the urban slums is far from offering a decent living. Thus, according to the fourth all India slum survey of NSSO, under the 65th NSS survey, amenities such as street lights, latrines, drainage, sewage and medical facilities appeared to be non-existent for more than 10 per cent of the notified slums, at the time of the survey, as was the case five years earlier, while more than 20 per cent of the non-notified slums reported the absence of street lights, latrines, drainage, sewage and garbage disposal facilities during the survey as was five years earlier. In fact, in some spheres, there seems to be a regressive tendency with regard to slum development, for instance, electricity for both street lighting and household purposes appears to have registered a decline for notified slums, from 84 per cent in 2002, to 76 per cent in 2008-2009, at an all-India level, with States like Gujarat (15%) and Odisha (32%) being worse off in this regard.

The situation is even poorer in non-notified slums as only 15 per cent of them have street light facility. Again, during monsoons, the proportion of notified slums affected by water-logging has increased from 36 per cent in 2002, to 41 per cent in 2008-2009, while 54 per cent of the non-notified slums remain affected during the monsoons. It may be noted that in some States like Odisha, 99 per cent of the notified slums were found to be waterlogged during monsoons even in 2008-2009.

The situation with regard to the absence of latrine facilities is very grim in some States like Odisha where 49 per cent of the notified slums and 36 per cent of the non-notified slums, Gujarat with 39 per cent of notified and 48 per cent of the non-notified slums and Tamil Nadu with 27 per cent of notified and 40 per cent of the non-notified slums were found to have no latrine facilities at all. Again, with regard to notified slums, Gujarat (62%) and Odisha (49%) were worse off in the context of the absence of drainage facilities in 2008-2009, while Uttar Pradesh (54%), followed by Odisha (49%) and Gujarat (40%) were faring poorly in terms of lack of drainage facilities in non-notified slums. As regards the distance from the nearest hospital, 72 per cent of the slums in Odisha, 64 per cent in Uttar Pradesh, 63 per cent in West Bengal, 58 per cent in Tamil Nadu and 57 per cent in Gujarat were located at a distance of more than one kilometre away, with a dismal all-India figure of 52 per cent. Thus, in terms of improvement in slum facilities since 2002, States like Gujarat, Odisha and Madhya Pradesh were lagging behind all the other States. It is important to note that the NSS survey records the 'availability', and not the 'adequacy' of amenities in these slums. Thus, there is a possibility of the over-all picture being much darker, in terms of adequacy. As may be observed from the above data, urban poverty also seems to be concentrated in a few States, particularly the States of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh (the poverty data for the States of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand are included in that of Bihar, Madhya

Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh), which houses 40 percent of the urban poor, with the NSSO data suggesting an increase in urban poverty in these States—from 31.1 per cent in 1973-74 to 42.0 per cent in 2004-2005 (Planning Commission 2011).

It has been observed by scholars that the deadline to make India a 'slum-free' nation under Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY), and the urge to design 'world-class' cities has resulted in several hurried decisions to attract national and global investments, for instance, fast track Public Private Partnership (PPP) models emerging as the new favourites (Randolph and Naik 2013 Kundu 2012 b), and a mad rush to 'sanitise' (Kundu and Saraswati 2012) cities of slums even without any alternative housing being provided. This is being done by arbitrarily categorising all slums as 'hazardous', a step that is being followed by several States and local governments. Kundu (2012 b) notes that this is owing to the fact that cities are required to contribute a share of resources to obtain central funds under Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY), and are thus moving towards the PPP model, which is especially the case with premium value lands. Under this model, slum dwellers are being shifted to urban fringes while their lands would be utilised for revenue-generating commercial developments and high-rise apartments. He argues that this practice should be countered by developing a schema for sharing the cost of land provision and construction between the concerned central, State, and private agencies, under RAY.

One may notice a spate of slum evictions and demolition drives especially in metropolitan cities, in order that the city is ridden of any 'unattractive' constructions. The fact that slums of Delhi were literally screened off from the public view, during the Commonwealth Games, stands testimony to the elitist mindset of the authorities. As has been mentioned above, most of the city's poor were in fact driven out during the Games to put up a 'good show'. However, the manner in which the relocation of slums is being carried out raises serious questions related to the possibility of leading a 'normal' existence for

the urban poor. In this context, it may be noted that recently, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) has proposed to relocate families from Govindpuri's Bangladeshi resettlement colonies to a high rise building in South Delhi. This is despite the fact that according to the RAY, the redevelopment of slums should not be carried out more than one kilometre from their current location, and housing projects should be designed in consultation with slum dwellers. As past records show, such relocation drives only result in the urban poor selling off the flats allocated to them to the highest bidder, only to go back to their squatter settlements. Being relocated far away from the neighbourhood fish market, the Govindpuri slum dwellers are likely to lose their prime source of income, while they are least likely to be able to meet the costs related to water supply, electricity, sewerage etc that living in high rises require, thereby making it an absolutely improbable proposition for them to live in such arrangements (Randolph and Naik 2013). This becomes all the more problematic in the era of privatisation; for instance, citizens of Delhi have witnessed a whopping rise in electricity bills ever since the power sector reforms have been undertaken, which handed over the transmission and distribution of electricity to the private sector. While the situation has grown worse over the years, it has been revealed that the inflated electricity bills are only adding to the 'huge profits' of the various DISCOMS, who are alleged to have been involved in 'fudging' their records and 'committing fraud' to show losses in their revenue, while actually making profits (*The Times of India* 2013).

All this signifies the 'reconstitution of the citizen as a viable market subject' (Coelho and Maringanti 2012). It may be observed that within the neo-liberal governance paradigm there appears to be a range of two-tier systems, which endeavour to separate the services designed for full-cost paying urban citizens from those that are provided to the poor (Coelho and Maringanti 2012). It may be most clearly noticeable in the two-track structure of the JNNURM,

whereby Urban Infrastructure and Governance (UIG) that funds big infrastructure schemes, has provisions of user fees, and encourages private participation is clearly separated from Basic Services to the Urban Poor (BSUP), which is much poorly funded, besides being housed in a separate ministry (Coelho and Maringanti 2012). In addition, it is increasingly being observed that under the neo-liberal system of governance, public bodies like municipalities are often instructed to segregate the mainstream services that are rendered to metered customers, from the ones that are for the 'non-revenue generating' customers who are residents of poorer neighbourhoods like slums (Coelho and Maringanti 2012). Besides, it has been observed that under JNNURM, as well as under RAY, there has been a constant exclusion of small and medium towns from plans for improving and allocating urban infrastructure. This is despite the fact of there being a higher incidence of poverty and slum-like conditions in such towns than in big cities (Kundu 2012 a).

### **'Participation': a boon or a Bane?**

The rolling back of the state following the LPG drive, and the 74th Amendment Act of the constitution, making way for increasing disinvestment on the one hand, and decentralisation on the other, has resulted in the gaps in service delivery being filled in to a considerable extent by civil society associations, under the new 'participatory' framework. Of the diverse associations that make up this zone, neighbourhood groups such as Residents Welfare Associations (RWAs) have come to occupy a major place especially in the metropolitan cities. For instance, in Delhi, the 'My Delhi- I Care' drive under the Bhagidari or citizen government partnership scheme of the Sheila Dikshit Government, the RWAs, which are registered under the Societies Act, were required to coordinate with a number of government departments, parastatal and civic agencies, with respect to issues such as water supply, sanitation and solid waste management, problems pertaining

to electricity, recreation space, traffic and parking, neighbourhood security, roads and flyovers, encroachments and constructions, etc. However, the issues that may be portrayed as problems by the joint forum of RWAs where the dominant voices are those of the upper income colonies may not be significant for the urban poor for whom the major question is the access to basic amenities and means of livelihood. Again, the projected 'issues of concern' may in fact be detrimental to the urban poor, as they hardly have a strong voice to represent it, or to be a part of the participatory mechanism. RWAs, for instance, have been strongly opposed to the creation of bus corridors in Delhi. It has been noted that residents of posh colonies like Greater Kailash, Vasant Vihar etc want more road space for cars and other private vehicles [though more than 60 per cent of Delhi's residents travel by bus (Civil Society News 2008)], and most RWAs of well to do colonies have been demanding the demolition of nearby slums as it diminishes their land value! In a comparative study of three RWAs in South Delhi it was observed that the attitude of the RWAs towards the urban poor or the slum dwellers varied by class and by status (Dutta, 2010). Thus, it is feared that the participation of RWAs in framing of city plans will only give a boost to the 'mall-culture', while being detrimental to the interests of the deprived sections.

Nonetheless, it would be wrong to argue that all civil society groups are simply voices of the elite. Many such groups have been instrumental in pressurising the government to formulate and implement policies for safeguarding the rights of the urban poor. Further, the 65th NSS survey reveals that NGOs have played a vital role in bringing about improvements in educational facilities at the primary level in 13 per cent of the notified slums at an all-India level. It has also been observed that these civil society groups have played a major role in the improvement of latrine, sewerage and drainage systems in non-notified slums of India, as is explicated in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Percentage Distribution of Slums Reporting Improvement of Facilities

Facility	Notified Slum			Non Notified Slum				
	Government	NGO	Residents	Others	Government	NGO	Residents	Others
Water Supply	94	1	1	0	88	4	2	4
Street Light	94	2	2	1	91	6	1	2
Electricity	89	5	4	0	86	6	2	4
Latrine	82	2	11	3	67	10	16	4
Sewerage	92	6	0	3	82	13	1	4
Drainage	97	1	0	0	85	8	4	0
Garbage Disposal	94	3	0	2	95	2	2	2
Road within the slum	94	1	3	1	90	5	4	0
Approach road to the slum	98	0	0	0	94	4	1	1
Educational facility at primary level	84	13	0	1	89	4	1	4
Medical facility	87	7	0	4	83	3	2	13

**Source:** 'Some Characteristics of Urban Slums 2008-2009', NSS 65th Round (June 2008-June 2009):31

## Conclusion

India, in the era of the LPG, with its GDP-centric policies has somehow left its poor behind. Although a number of policies for the alleviation of urban poverty have been formulated, most of these have been driven by the urge to develop slum-free cities, thereby resulting in severe evictions, demolitions and displacements, and therefore a highly exclusionary urban growth. The new reforms have created two blatant categories of citizens—the ‘full-cost-paying’ citizens for whom all the best facilities are available and the ‘non-revenue generating’ underprivileged sections, who have no access to such facilities. Further, there is a worrisome tendency on the part of the government and even certain sections of the civil society to give in to elitist demands, thereby further worsening the condition of the urban poor.

Thus, there arises a major need for shifting the emphasis of government policies from the spatial dimensions of poverty to other considerations as well, in order to make them more inclusionary and holistic in nature. It may be observed that many of those who are poor in the urban areas may have adequate dwelling units but may be leading a hand-to-mouth existence due to lack of employment opportunities. It is important that more emphasis is laid on skill up-gradation besides job creation and efforts should be made to disseminate vocational education among the underprivileged, which will enable them to earn their living in the long run. Further, efforts should be made to make financial assistance in terms of micro-credit easily available for those below the poverty line. There is also a need to take into account the social dimensions of poverty, since poverty seems to be concentrated amongst certain vulnerable social categories. Again, female-headed households are at a greater risk of getting into the trap of chronic poverty. Thus, the gender dimension should be adequately paid attention to in the various plan programmes.

Special attention should also be given to the differently-abled and to those who are victims of various accidents and diseases. The lack of

social security measures and safety nets for those in the unorganised sector is a major reason behind their inability to escape the trap of poverty. This should be immediately looked into, and a congenial atmosphere for work should be ensured if the workers in the informal sector are not to remain perennially within the clutches of chronic poverty. The extant policies which deal with the above considerations should be made more stringent if they are to have any impact on the poverty situation in urban areas. The regional dimension of poverty should also be addressed at the earliest, since both rural and urban poverty seems to be concentrated in certain regions of the country, which are also the zones of extremism and lawlessness. The constant neglect of small and medium towns from the various plan programmes also need to be rectified. Besides, steps should be taken to ensure greater and equitable access to health facilities. In this context, the introduction of the National Urban Health Mission can be seen to be a welcome step.

One may also take some heart from the fact that the urban poor are being identified on the basis of the recommendations of the Hashim Committee, which sought to identify the target families for the various governmental schemes, based on their social, economic and occupational vulnerabilities, that would be achieved through the country wide socio-economic and caste census (SECC). This methodology is expected to yield a poverty ratio higher, and yet closer to the one which had been calculated according to the report of the expert committee headed by C Rangarajan, as against the methodology used by the Tendulkar Committee. However, there are growing concerns about the reliability and completeness of the SECC data, which has again, only been partially released. Further, the recent 'rights' based approach is also a major step in reaching the goal of poverty alleviation in the long run. In the field of education, the 'Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act 2009'—which entitles children between 6 to 14 years to free and compulsory

education—is a significant step indeed, since education opens up a host of possibilities for the underprivileged. However, despite the Supreme Court ruling providing for 25 per cent reservation for the deprived sections in private schools, a number of such schools are reluctant to comply, and some of them also end up harassing the students from the lower income brackets (The Times of India, 2013 a.). Again, the Food Security Act, which seeks to cover 50 per cent of the urban populace, besides 75 per cent of the rural population, by granting each beneficiary 5kg of subsidized grains (rice, wheat or millet) per month is also a fundamental step in the context of the efforts being made for the attainment of food security and for the removal of hunger poverty. It may be recalled that the provisions of this Act also legitimizes the beneficiaries of the Mid day meal scheme, the Integrated Child Development Service Scheme and the Public Distribution System. However, it remains to be seen as to how far the various states succeed in implementing this Act in letter and spirit.

In the ultimate analysis, the eradication of urban poverty can only come about when the deficits in legitimacy, development, democracy and governance (Kumar 2011) are addressed with care, along with an overall change in people's mindset that looks upon the poor not as a 'burden' or a 'menace' but as equal partners in the country's development.

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