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# *Inside*

Slum free India ! – The Dream

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Ever since the Hon'ble President of India announced the vision for a slum[1] free India, this has been the centre point of discussions among the intelligentsia in the social and urban development field. Based on the observations of the Parekh Committee that 5 years is too short a time for this dream to come true, the time frame of 5 years is now considered the first phase for working towards a slum free India. If a structured methodology is followed then this dream is quite achievable.

There is a need for a paradigm shift in our approach and for dispelling a few myths before we proceed.

ARE SLUMS REALLY A BAD PLACE TO LIVE IN?

When we say slums, we are talking about a place which more than 93 million[2] people call home. When India is having an upper hand in global economy through a demographic dividend, one in every eight child *(0 to 6 years old)* lives in a slum; thus the situation is grave. But before we set to solve the problem we need to have a better understanding of the problem itself. No doubt a slum has many negative aspects, but there are many positives to it which we need to preserve. Preservation of these positives is all the more important because even majority of the planned development in urban India lacks them.
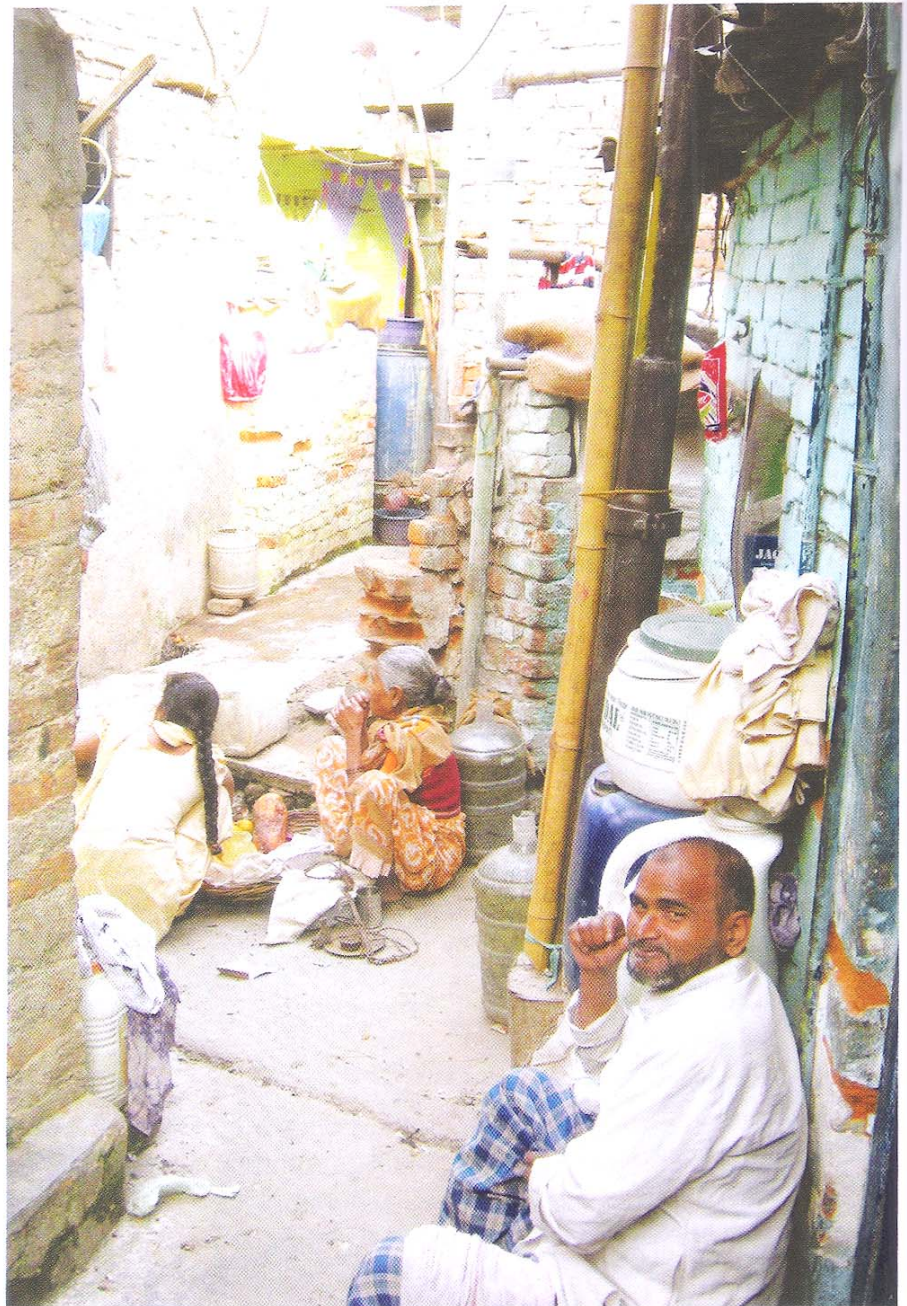
Street as a Living Room

[1] The term 'slum' used throughout the article refers to urban slums as defined by Pronab Sen committee report [2010]

[2] Census [2011]

Social Structure

Slums in general have a very intricate social structure. The very organic nature of the slums helps in building strong inter-personal relationships. It should be noted that in current times one even refuses to recognise the next door neighbour in an apartment while an entire *gully* in a slum lives like a family[3]. The alley *(gully)* in a slum is the most vibrant and important open space. During different times of a day the street serves various functions as per the needs of the occupants, acting like a strong social spine for the community within and the neighbouring locality.

Major community interaction happens on the street. The mornings are dominated by women, who share the space for daily activities from washing clothes to cutting vegetables, and the afternoon is mainly dominated by the kids who come back from school and play in the gully, every member of the community keeps an eye on them. By evening the male members sit outside and discuss work[4].

One of the most talked about slum redevelopment is Maharashtra's SRA schemes where the builder gets the right to the land after the completion of houses for the slum dwellers. Taking from SRA schemes in Pune, the flats created for the slum dwellers completely ignores the social structure. One of the main reasons for this is because there is no participatory planning process. The SRA scheme has a very good process in place for informing the slum dwellers on what they are getting, but there is no process in place for the community to get involved at the design stage; thus the resulting design is the outcome of an architect's vision who has never lived the way the community lives. A stark difference can be seen in the city of Sangli, just couple of hours from Pune; where an NGO 'Shelter Associates' have involved the community in the design process through GIS and other architectural tools. The design of new homes for slum dwellers at Sangli, demonstrates how the social structure of the community can be enhanced by the involvement of the community which thereby improves the local environment.

In a typical architectural logic, interiors of a house should not be visible from the other house, so generally in apartments, flats are staggered to avoid the entrances facing each other, which is a good design practice in usual scenario. But experience from the slums clearly shows that the first level of interior space of a house in a slum is permeable and needs community access. This particular issue and many other such nuances are unacceptable for a 'normal' architectural mind, thus the community needs to be involved in the design from the beginning.

Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY) has a very detailed chapter on community participation It requires 70% community consensus for a project to go ahead, but the biggest road *block for this is the lack of capacity in ULBs,* also there are only a handful of CBOs working in housing sector which aggravates this problem.

Morphology

The organic layout of the slums produces a

Sculptors in Gulbai Tekra, Ahmedabad

[3] This and further observations in this article on communities in slums is based on authors experience in studying slums in different parts of India.
[4] Based on study of street activity in the slums of 'Sunder Nagari' in Delhi and 'Baba LuiJhoparpatti' in Ahmadabad by the author

mix of different sized houses, thus addressing the varied demands of the slumdwellers, including rental options. It should be noted that one size won't fit all in this sector. A slum is not a homogeneous entity, the heterogeneity of a slum is what is difficult to replicate in a new development. The mix of different types of housing and commercial options is based on the market demand. In a slum there is a differential mix of both commercial and housing. Where as in housing itself there is a wide range-

1. Different size of houses
2. Rental houses/rooms
3. Dormitories
4. Single room tenements

The proportions of different types in this heterogeneous entity vary from place to place in a city itself. This mixed character needs to be preserved whenever an intervention is done in a slum. JNNURM established the minimum size for a dwelling to be 25 sq mt. But what is more important and determines the quality of life in a dwelling unit is the per person area. Many slums have 6-10 people staying in a house, thus providing them with a 25 Sq m house means that one person gets maximum of 4 sq m, which is worse than providing a 15 sq m room for single occupancy. Thus, any slum redevelopment project should consider a mix of different housing typologies that need to be incorporated. Based on the location, there should be a mix of typologies between dormitories to joint family units.

Economics

As the general rule goes: almost always there is no one who is unemployed in a slum! One of the main reasons for the focus of "insitu" redevelopment in RAY is to retain the livelihood options of the community which has developed over the years. Keeping the location intact is not an action enough to keep the livelihood of the community. Slums in general have a varied occupational involvement and in that regard every slum is different from each other. While designing for a slum the spatial needs for these occupations and its related activities need to be taken care of individually.

Every slum is involved in different economic activities. The Sunder Nagari slum in Delhi, is primarily a shoe making community. Each house is a mini factory and loads of different sized shoes are produced in each house, thus there is a need for different spatial design of these houses in case of redevelopment. Similarly, Gulbai Tekra in Ahmedabad mainly consists of sculptors. Now this is a different case from Sunder Nagari because in Gulbai Tekra the houses are normal, but the community spaces (or the clustering of the houses) are articulated in a manner to create workshops for these artefacts. Also there are special spatial requirements like protecting the sculptures from sun and rain. These examples are presented to emphasise that there is more to livelihood than location.
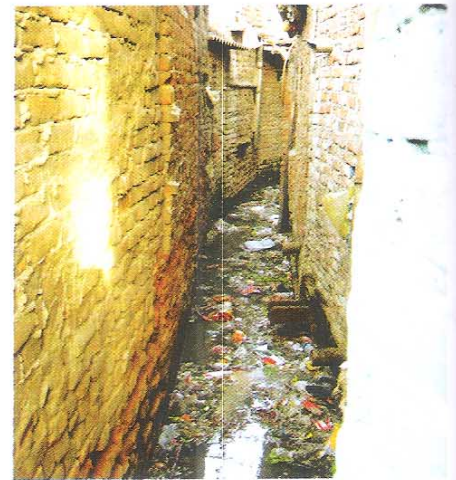
Lack of sanitation in slums - Jawaharlal Nehru Camp, Delhi

WAY FORWARD

When one talks about slum free India, then it is a huge number; the magnitude itself is enough to understand that simply eradicating slums and rebuilding from scratch will never solve the issue. As of now, India has very limited resources and limited time to achieve the goal, thus we need to concentrate on improving the conditions of the existing stock by adopting a strategic approach which is participatory, involving both community and experts in this field.
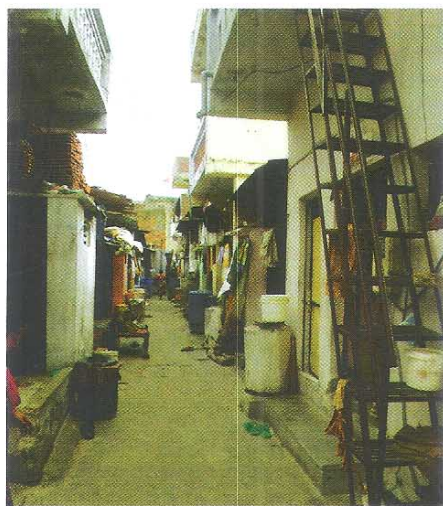
Conservative surgery[5]

The pressing issues in slums are

1. Sanitation
2. Basic services like water and electricity
3. Structural safety and quality of the dwelling unit

Therefore these issues need to be tackled on priority. Health related issues are

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[5] Conservative surgery is an urban design methodology developed by Sir Patrick Geddes

Considerable Increase in self-investment for housing after SNP in Sharif Khan ni Challi in Ahmedabad

predominant in slums, so a sanitation plan needs to be made with community participation. A multi-disciplinary team[6] with the help of a community based organization needs to be involved in this process. Community knowledge can be used regarding the flooding pattern and local bottlenecks for devising an efficient servicing system without demolishing existing houses. With a sanitation network in place, it becomes easy for laying water

and electricity lines taking safety into consideration.

Structural safety and quality of dwelling units is a complicated issue. Most of the slums are self-constructed, thus the best way to influence the quality of these structures is through mason training. Masons have a trust factor in these communities and imparting basic knowledge of quality construction practices and rules to the mason will have a big impact. Indore and Ahmedabad have implemented successful slum networking program (SNP), which is a partial example of a conservative surgery approach. Sharif Khan Pathanni Chaali in Ahmedabad was one of the first few slums to be tested with SNP. Basic services and sanitation was laid with community involvement through the NGO SEWA-MHT and the work was completed in 2000. After the SNP program there has been a considerable increase in investment on improvement of the quality of the houses by slum dwellers themselves. Also the quality of life has tremendously improved after the initiative.

Additional housing stock

India has a housing deficit of 25 million and 98% of this deficit is in EWS category; and with a 2.07 % urban growth rate, this deficit is bound to increase. Thus there is no option but to add to the housing stock.

Subsidised houses or free houses create perverse incentives and the repercussions are known to everyone. Instead there should be a diverse option for all the income levels and family types. Everyone need not own a house, if a person is economically weak then there should be an affordable rental option available, rather than subsidising a house for ownership, the subsidy should go into the process of establishing affordable rental option. The new development should allow community management through creation of cooperatives. In terms of owning a house, those who can access finance (or self-finance) can own a house directly and those who cannot, can also be given a choice of rent to ownership model.

In order to achieve the dream of a slum free India, we need to be innovative and practical in our approach. Terms like 'cut-off-date' need to be removed and an approach based on self-selection should be developed for the slum dwellers. Initiatives should be devised which could become a catalyst for quality improvement and any initiative should be judged through a social equity lens.

Hope we soon have better and adequate housing for all.
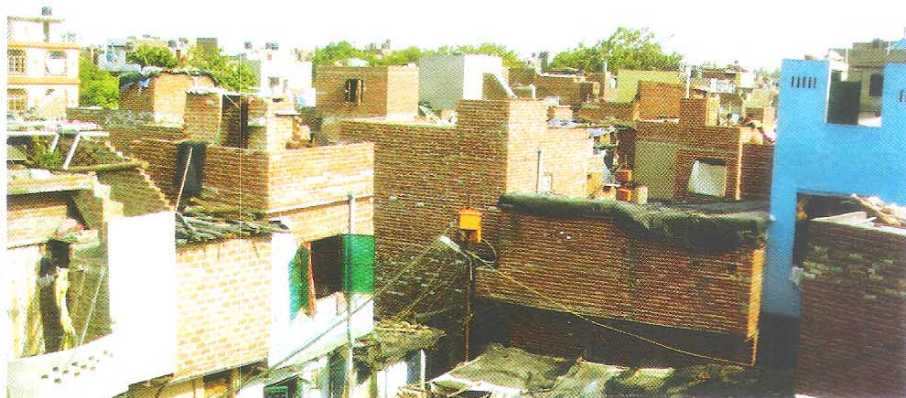
Exposed walls show the poor structural safety of houses in Sunder Nagari, Delhi

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[6] A multi-disciplinary team should consists atleast of (but not restricted to) architects, urban designers and planners, sociologists, economists and community members