

## Ensuring Identity and Entitlements of India's Urban Poor

- K.R.Antony<sup>1</sup>

About 31.2% of Indian population live in urban areas (2011 Census) and 30-40% of them live in slums or similar habitations. No city or municipality, however pompous and glamorous it is, could ever camouflage its ugly slums. Slum clearance or city beautification drive was an ever going incomplete agenda. Slums are even categorized as "legal and illegal slums".

Slum dwellers are always needed for the productive economy of the city. Why then they are treated illegal, unwanted and undesirable? Their caste, class, religion, occupation or dwelling makes them socially excluded. This social exclusion has all the administrative backing, as many of them do not have legally valid papers or documents. And so they have to bribe or pay extra for their water supply, sanitation, toilets, bathrooms, electricity connection and the list goes on. Even to sleep on the pavement in night or beg in the day time they have to pay "mamul" to the power structure of the area which includes police. They are exposed to crime and violence, actively or passively, day and night and even "implicated" as "crime suspects". That gives police or underworld goons to exploit them continuously or regularly or undertake demolition drives of their dwellings.

How do we bring some legitimacy and authenticity to their existence? Trade unions and political party affiliations bring some protection to them at a premium. But is there a better way? What could be a "rights-based" approach? All of them are citizens of this country and "internally displaced population" for various reasons. It is the collapse of the rural economy that expelled them to urban areas in search of greener pastures which they soon realise as nothing but a mirage. They also need services and privileges which other citizen enjoy as a routine. Geographical relocation or forced migration should not deny their basic rights as a citizen of this country. How do we go about it?

Any rights-based development worker among urban poor should start with efforts to establish their client's identity.

1) To ensure an identity of the poor the first document required is generation of a Birth Certificate of young ones through the local hospital and urban authorities. The older ones can get themselves enrolled in the Voters' List at the earliest opportunity of an election coming next. All verifications are diluted when the party workers get activated during election time. Once a voter's identification card is in hand, the other cards are easier. The periodical enrolment process for Aadhaar Card is another golden opportunity. The generation of BPL Card and Caste certificate are difficult tasks. Residence proof is another road block towards many entitlements. When the residence itself is in an unauthorized colony or settlement it is difficult to get. An LPG connection address or phone connection address may also face similar difficulties. Photo identity through PAN card or Passport is not applicable in this segment of population. They never had an income level that is to be taxed and the only travel document they had is a second class ticket to this city from the railway station nearest to their home village. Who can vouch for them and whose authority government can rely on is a question never answered.

2) To ensure entitlements for basic services of urban poor

we must ensure that they undertake certain essential steps of getting enrolled and registered in government records. Say registration of pregnant women in anganwadi centre or health centre will make antenatal and maternity services, nutrition supplementation, early child care, immunization services, emergency transportation in medical emergency, etc., much easier. Development workers must facilitate them to obtain Ration Card, Disability Certificate, Widow/Old age pension, etc.

3) To facilitate seeking care and protection through dialling 100, 101, 108, 1098 for Emergency services. As a step towards empowerment, these community groups must be given information and education on the importance of knowing the scope of these services, the way to call for these services without delay and the importance of taking leadership in a crisis. Mock drills under technical supervision will make them more confident. A number of summer time fires could be put off early and damages minimised had they been trained to call for help by dialling these numbers.

4) To ensure dignity and protection of women and children, "Crime Mapping" exercise can be undertaken and thereby identify vulnerable areas and timings. The remedial measures can be worked out by the neighbourhood groups in collaboration with municipal/Corporation authorities and Police as demonstrated in some municipalities of Kerala.

5) To facilitate financial empowerment through entrepreneurship and banking, the first step must be opening and operating a bank/post office saving account. To fill up forms and gathering supportive documents need some help from knowledgeable persons. Once an account is opened and they see that their savings are safely growing without their alcoholic men folk snatching it away or they themselves yielding to the temptation of spending money on luxurious purchases, they will feel confident. This minimises their dependency on money lenders and agents of easy loan and so will avoid "debt trapping and indebtedness". An empowered neighbourhood group through responsible banking will boost their micro enterprises and marketing avenues of goods produced by them.

6. To ensure coverage of services for all so that nobody is left out, we need to walk that extra mile to reach that "unreached". It needs search or inquiry and interaction with the most underprivileged. Once we have identified the unreached, we need to connect them to whom they are supposed to serve them. This exercise is called "mapping of habitations of Urban poor and mapping of resource institutions like AWC, health posts, hospitals, government schools, PDS centres" and identifying uncovered areas of habitations and bringing this disconnect to the attention of Municipal/Corporation authorities.

By no means the above "To do" list is complete and exhaustive. It is learning by doing and we will be coming across many other issues as we go along tackling one by one. Launched in May 2013 with 942 cities and towns above 50,000 populations, the National Urban Health Mission is a concrete step taken to ensure right to health of the urban poor.

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