

Shifting terrains of communities and community organization: reflections on organizing for housing rights in Mumbai

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Abstract Mumbai has historically been a home to several struggles of urban underprivileged groups. The city assured spaces to slums in the past, albeit grudgingly. Cases of displacement were few and intensely contested. However, the last decade has witnessed a considerable expansion of the nature and scale of threats to the existence of slum-dwellers in the city. Attempts to organize slum communities began in the 1960s following a trajectory of locality development and then housing rights. The earlier vision of broad-based development and struggles of urban poor has given way to fragmented, issue-based and localized struggles. Intense politicization and competition for valuable resources and opportunities have fractured this potent constituency comprising about 60 percent of city dwellers. The paper traces the slippery and challenging terrain of organizing slum communities around their rights and raises questions about the location and nature of community practice.

Introduction

Mumbai has historically been a home to several labor struggles and other forms of agitations of urban underprivileged groups. The city with a colonial past gradually gave way to a metropolis that integrated the various classes of society and assured spaces slums, albeit grudgingly. Cases of displacement were few and intensely contested. The last decade has witnessed significant changes in this scenario with a national emphasis on developing Mumbai as an international financial center. The nature and scale of threats to the existence of slum-dwellers in the city have

considerably expanded since. Moreover, displacement has taken complex forms.

Attempts to organize slum communities began in the 1960s following a trajectory of locality development and then housing rights. The earlier vision of broad-based development and struggles of urban poor has given way to fragmented, issue-based and localized struggles. Intense politicization and competition for valuable resources and opportunities have fractured this potent constituency comprising about 60 percent of the city dwellers. There are few wins, some spaces for negotiation and many more failures. The paper traces this slippery and challenging terrain of organizing slum communities and raises questions about the location and nature of community practice.

Slums in Mumbai

Slums – the vast pools of cheap, unorganized labor and service providers first emerged in Mumbai in the 1930s when the city was facing an acute housing crisis. At this time slums emerged as extensions of erstwhile fishing villages¹ often sites where undesirable economic activities could be dumped. In 1947 when India gained independence from the British, ~5 percent of the city's population lived in such areas (David, 1996).

Subsequent decades brought in increasing waves of poor migrants who were pulled to the city by economic opportunities and improved life chances. A combination of several factors including a severely limited supply of land (private and public) and sluggish housing activity resulted in an annual shortfall of some 45,000 housing units per year in the 1970s through the mid-1980s. This shortage was particularly acute in the lower income groups (MMRDA, 1996). All these factors accompanied by a soft State meant that the growth of slums was inevitable. Table 1 illustrates this phenomenal growth of slum population in the city in the post independent years.

The growth of slum population was sharpest in the 1970s which were characterized by severe droughts in a large part of the Deccan Plateau² bringing in distressed migrants to cities in search of livelihoods. This pace of migration has leveled off in recent years, but is still higher than the growth of the overall city population. According to the Census 2001,

1 Dharavi, Worli, Chunabhatti thus emerged as centers where activities such as garbage dumping, tanneries and leather processing were shifted prior to 1947. These areas are large slums today.

2 The Deccan plateau covers large parts of at least four states in India, namely Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

Table 1. Growth of slum population in Mumbai

Year	Total population of Mumbai	Slum population	Share of slum population (in percent)
1951	29,67,000	—	5
1961	41,52,000	4,00,000	12
1981	82,42,000	42,00,000	51
2001	120,00,000	62,40,000	48.9

Sources: Census of India, (D. Mahadevia and H. Narayan, unpublished data) and Sharma and Narender (1993).

the rate of growth of slum population in the cities of India exceeds the rate of urbanization.

Currently, 48.9 percent of the city's population stays in slums (Census, 2001), defined as those areas which are (a) declared as slums by governments, (b) newly notified areas and (c) possess sixty to seventy households or 300 people living in 'kuccha'³ structures, in unsafe, substandard habitats devoid of human values. Other estimates⁴ put the slum dwelling population at 54–60 percent. Some 47 percent of slums are located on private lands; the others are located on public lands vested with various government authorities. The conditions of tenure and basic amenities in these settlements differ considerably. Thus, while 1822 (93 percent) of the slums are notified,⁵ 137 pockets are not notified. The majority of these notified slums have pucca⁶ housing structures, about 16 percent settlements, however, have a mix of kuccha-pucca structures (YUVA, 2001). The notified slums have a fair degree of access to basic amenities including water, toilets, street lights, drains and connecting streets. Most of these amenities are of the shared or public type. The non-notified slums have still poorer levels of access to services.

Official policy: between displacement and acceptance

The policy discourse on slum settlements has considerably changed in the sixty years since independence. This shift is closely linked to the increasing significance of the issue in terms of its intensity and the numbers involved.

3 Houses in slums may use a variety of materials including gunny bags, plastic, tin sheets, bricks, etc. These are called kuccha structures.

4 YUVA – a voluntary organization carried out a survey of slums for the Municipal Corporation of greater Mumbai to enable planning of sanitation facilities.

5 An act of notification involves the declaration of an area as a slum under provisions of the Slum Act of 1976; it is a form of legal recognition of the area and enables provision of services by the State. It also entitles the dwellers to rehabilitation in case of eviction.

6 A pucca house is one which utilizes permanent construction materials for the following components: floor, walls and roof.

A review of various programmes and policies pertaining to slums points out to three, roughly chronological, phases.

The phase of negation

Slums were seen as unfit housing and dens of crime in the initial years of planning and the concern was to demolish these and replace with 'acceptable' housing. Thus, the Slum Clearance Programme of 1956 vested the governments with necessary powers to compulsorily acquire slum areas and redevelop them. However, the limited volume of resources available for the program meant that redevelopment could not match the pace of demolitions or the pace of growth of slum areas. The phase of negation, therefore, slowly gave way to a phase where some reconciliation with the reality of slums took place.

The phase of tolerance

In 1972, the emphasis of government policy shifted from programmes involving redevelopment and rehabilitation to environment improvement through provision of tap water, sewer and storm water drains, community baths and latrines, paved roads, streetlights, etc. The Central Scheme of Environmental Improvement of Urban Slums was initially introduced in the major cities of the country and then in the 1980s extended to all urban areas. This was accompanied by a special grant to the Members of Parliament and State legislature to allot funds for carrying out development works in their own constituencies.

The phase of acceptance

The phase of acceptance was initiated in the 1980s. It consists of a spate of programs and policies that were sparked by increased attention to the issues of slums and housing at an international level.

The up-grading programme initiated in several Indian cities in the early 1980s was one of the earliest programmes indicating an acceptance of slum settlements as housing options of the poor. It offered tenure and physical security to the slum communities besides provision of assistance and incentives to people to improve their housing over time.

The Urban Basic Services Programme initiated in 1985 tried to institutionalize community participation, especially focusing on women's development besides amenities to improve the slum habitat. It also introduced a principle of convergence. These principles are also part of the programmatic thrust of the National Slum Development Programme introduced in 1996–1997 and are reiterated in the Draft National Slum Policy of 2002.

The discourse of acceptance in fact has now gained prominence. A review of policy would thus give the impression of 'evolution' from negation to

acceptance. In reality, displacements have continued, but the expression is largely muted through a whole range of institutional factors.

Slums are almost invisible in development plans of the city and in official data sets. None of the city's 2335 settlements are recorded on the development plan of the city; in fact several of the lands under slums have development plan reservations⁷ on them even though some of the settlements predate the development plan. This invisibility of slums and slum-dwellers to the 'official' eye perpetuates the vulnerability of slum-dwellers to multiple forms of displacement. It prevents them from investing in a safe and secure existence in the city, from contributing to the city as equal citizens and renders them dependent on political and administrative favors. Their existence in the city is perpetuated as second rate, unwanted people who live off the city's resources and can therefore be removed or wished away at will.

Displacements are not a new phenomenon in Mumbai. They have been a regular, almost invisible, facet of the city's administrative response to poor migrants' space (Gonsalves and Das, 1987) and have continued even when policies towards slums shifted from clearance towards tolerance and acceptance. Evictions form a daily target of the anti-encroachment squads of the local government. In most cases the victims of evictions are the non-notified slums. However, there are several instances where settled slums too have been displaced. The Janata Nagar (a slum settlement in the eastern suburbs) evictions of 20,000 slum-dwellers in 1972 and then en masse shifting of all pavement dwellers to the outskirts of the city in 1986 are two particularly notorious instances. In fact these have also sown the seeds of housing rights struggles in the city.

Housing rights struggles in Mumbai

In Mumbai the earliest civil society response to displacement was in the form of housing rights struggles. Thus, some trade unions and some political parties initiated sporadic mobilization efforts in slum and pavement dwellings. Thus, the Hind Mazdoor Kisan Panchayat (Indian Farmer and Workers Forum) was active in the pavements in the 1970s, but ceased its activity within three to four years. Other efforts to mobilize all elements of the urban underclass together too did not yield much results. At this juncture, several voluntary organizations operated in slum communities with an overall focus on locality development. These organizations where leadership was drawn from professionally trained social workers operated in a distinct sphere that had no relation to the organizational efforts, described earlier.

⁷ Reservations in the development plan indicate the intended use of the land, all other uses thereby become unauthorized.

In 1980s, the massive deporting of slum-dwellers launched by the then Chief Minister⁸ invoked widespread resentment and saw the advent of new actors in housing rights struggles. The striking development of this period was the emergence of voluntary groups who increasingly realized a need for a political engagement with development issues. The distinctiveness of the groups was the attempt to engage in popular politics distinct from electoral politics. They viewed slums as communities that were victims of a lopsided development process. There was a shift from locality development to viewing housing as a right. Organizing was seen as a vehicle for broader social change with the immediate issue being resistance to eviction but the larger goal was to influence the direction of development in a people-centered manner. A comprehensive demand for basic right to housing linked to other rights to the city was articulated at the city and national level. There were also attempts to build international coalitions. Several forms of people's associations and institutions were created through these efforts.

These efforts were effective in terms of qualitative improvements in awareness and capacities of local communities and leaders. They sought to define slum dwelling as a self-help effort and bring in an understanding of housing as a human right. There were attempts to elaborate the meaning of housing rights and to link them to other human rights more effectively through deliberations in International Conferences such as the Habitat.⁹ (Pimple and Kamat, 1998) At the ground level, these attempts at organization were successful including the agenda of rehabilitation in some development projects where displacement was involved. They were also able to generate and establish certain procedures¹⁰ in cases of eviction. The use of public events and means of protest, media advocacy and use of the public interest litigation¹¹ were some of the important means of effecting change.

These non-governmental organizations (NGOs) gradually became important institutions in their own right; at least two NGOs in Mumbai acquired the stature of international NGOs with several nationwide as well as international affiliations. Their role as expressing the concerns of

8 The Chief Minister is the head of the executive at the state, i.e. provincial level in India. Urban development is a state function and hence the critical role played by the CM as the head of this level.

9 The series of decadal UN conferences on Habitat issues was launched in 1976.

10 These procedures were first drafted as part of a subcommittee of the UN and were also applied in local courts. These procedures include information prior to eviction, an opportunity to represent etc.

11 The public interest litigation (PIL) is a form of seeking judicial intervention in matters concerning public interest. It has enabled intervention of courts in cases where there is a violation especially of civil and economic rights. Municipal colonies are residential structures erected by the Mumbai Municipal Corporation for their lower class workers.

the poor began to be increasingly recognized by Governments (Bhide, 1998). However, it is at this point itself that several fault lines began to emerge in the struggle. These became evident in the liberalization era of the post-1990s which posed new challenges.

Fractured constituencies

Slums in Mumbai today constitute a layered reality. They mean communities that undergo displacement about fifteen to twenty times a year, people who choose to live in the city without an assured shelter. They also mean communities that are extremely well settled for whom the slum is a burdensome label. They also consist of settlements that have a core of erstwhile villages, municipal colonies¹² and private chawls.¹³ The policy discourse on slums disregards these differences and treats all settlements as one.

Slum settlements are further differentiated on the basis of institutional jurisdictions over the land on which they are located. Slums were allowed to come up on private lands as a means of preventing them from being brought under the purview of land ceiling; provision of services on these has been entirely subject to the availability of a no-objection the land owner. Service standards have been extremely variable. The lands belonging to the various Central Government Authorities represent a category where the threats to the existence of settlements have been few but there has been tremendous resistance to any engagement with rehabilitation policies. Settlements on State Government or Corporation lands have been relatively more fortunate because of the ease with which they have been declared as slums and services provided.

The most significant way in which slum-dwellers differ is, however, by virtue of datelines. The year in which a structure in a slum is erected and enumerated in official records and the year from which a household's existence in the city is recorded has assumed particular significance in the establishment of the household's entitlement to housing in the city. At first, the year for tolerance was 1976 but was subsequently extended to 1980, 1985, 1995 and more recently 2000. The electoral debate usually hinges on the datelines. In a context in which years are so important and where data sets are fuzzy and open to maneuver, the datelines become an important political weapon that creates divisions among residents of settlements.

¹² Chawls are a form of residential arrangement where passages and several other amenities are shared, houses are usually in a row.

¹³ Chawls are usually residential structures constructed in a row sharing common passages and amenities.

In several settled slums, the proportion of tenants is quite high. However, the Slum Act is blind to tenancies, thereby rendering the tenants vulnerable to effects of both outright eviction and rehabilitation of the slum.

Slum has thus been perpetuated as a fractured constituency that has never been able to leverage its numerical strength.

Shifting terrains

The policy discourse on slums is currently more accommodative than it ever was. The 74th Constitutional Amendment¹⁴ has made poverty alleviation and improvement of living conditions in slums essential functions of urban local bodies. The Draft National Slum policy declared that slums are an integral part of urban fabric. The current direction of urban governance reforms introduced by the Central Government follow a similar vein.

NGOs are increasingly a part of every Government Committee for key policy decisions, for preparing status reports for international conferences as well as participating in implementation of programs so designed. Decision-making pertaining to slums has become more 'participatory'; participatory processes are a part of several programs. The issues of hitherto ignored groups like pavement dwellers are now receiving attention.

Evictions have, however, acquired a vicious edge since the late 1990s; their scale, occurrence, form are in many ways unprecedented. The last ten years have seen a remarkable interest in renewing the infrastructure in Mumbai and making it a world class city to attract international capital. Several projects in the pipeline – road expansion, construction of metro, river front development, airport area development, drainage etc. – pose threats to scores of slum-dwellers in these areas. Displacement is thus acquiring an enormity of scale.

The eviction of 85,000 slum-dwellers from the Sanjay Gandhi National Park¹⁵ in multiple phases from 1999 to 2001 represents one of the largest and inhuman demolitions in recent times. This was followed by evictions in Daulat Nagar¹⁶ and Bhabrekar Nagar.¹⁷ Some of these evictions were

14 The 74th Constitutional Amendment gave the status of constitutional entities to urban local bodies with accorded functions, it thus paved the way for decentralization.

15 Sanjay Gandhi National Park is a reserved forest located in the northern part of Mumbai. These evictions in the park were in response to a PIL that alleged that slum-dwellers were causing ecological damage due to their encroachment on the core area of the park. There was a series of judgments about the case from 1999 to 2001.

16 Daulat Nagar is a slum settlement in a Western suburb. It was evicted in response to a PIL by a citizen group that claimed that their rights to development assured under the Town Planning Scheme had been denied due to the presence of slums and made a plea for them to be restored.

17 Bhabrekar Nagar is a settlement in the North West part of Mumbai; most of it is land reclaimed from the marsh by people. The land belongs to the State government with no urgent development

in response to court decisions; there was therefore an element of compulsion about the actions. However, they were conducted in an extremely brutal manner, endangering lives of the residents whose homes and livelihoods were already threatened.¹⁸

A wave of evictions in October–January 2004–2005 affected between 65,000 and 86,000 slum homes in Mumbai spread over twenty-one communities. The viciousness of these evictions which continued for over three months was shocking. The pace of evictions has remained uninterrupted almost since then with few respites during monsoons or in election periods.

New threats

In the past, the existence of slums in the city was tolerated through a combination of a middle class that depended on slum-dwellers as service providers, jurisprudence and media coverage that was responsive to issues of survival in the city, and a politic that was aware of the potential of slums as a constituency. The emergent economy of the city, however, does not see the presence of a working class as critical, thus unleashing forces that threaten the existence of slum-dwellers.

The ‘voice’ of the upwardly mobile middle and elite class citizen¹⁹ has emerged as one of the most significant changes in the Indian urban landscape in the last decade. It has transformed from being inactive in politics to an activism that has spearheaded projects partnering with the local government, set new planning agendas and obtained resource backup, initiated new forms of accountability of the administration and advocated issues such as retention of open spaces, clean elections etc. The anti-slum agenda is an implicit part of several of these initiatives²⁰ (Ze’rah, 2006).

Jurisprudence in India has taken a distinct shift in the last few years. In the past, the judiciary was seen as an upholder of the civil rights of the poor. The Constitution of India does not recognize a right to housing, but several interpretations of the right to life²¹ have upheld the right to housing as an essential obligation of the State. A recent series of judgments,

being contemplated. Its eviction in June 1997 in the midst of monsoons was sudden and brought great misery to people, about one-third of which are now resettled at the same site.

18 In all the three cases discussed, there was at least one life lost, there were also cases of people being injured, houses set on fire, assault on women.

19 Nainan (2008) has written in great detail on this dimension. Also see Kundu and Kundu (unpublished report) for discussion of the same in Delhi.

20 Ze’rah discusses how citizens forums created for management of civic services in locality are more actively engaged with filing anti-encroachment PILs.

21 The right to life is a fundamental right under the Indian Constitution. In the past several judgments, e.g. AIR 1981 SC 746 and AIR 1990 SC 630, have interpreted the right to life as a right to live with dignity that pre-supposes a right to livelihood housing and other basic needs.

however, have begun to perceive slum dwelling as an unlawful act deserving of punishment rather than tolerance and remedial measures (Adenwala, 1998) with the judgments in respect to the Sanjay Gandhi National Park a case in point. The manner in which the Mumbai High Court responded and hitched onto the issue of environmental restoration with a total disregard for slum-dwellers residing on the land, its orders for execution of the demolitions (these included the use of Special Reserve Police Force, use of helicopters) and for ensuring protection from future encroachment are an example of increasing insensitivity of the higher courts to the plight of the slum-dwellers. This judgment underlined and indicated a new trend of intolerance towards unauthorized actions of the poor. This trend has since been witnessed in several other judgments. The media too, in a corporatized form, has increasingly become non-cognizant or even hostile to the cause of the slum-dwellers. News of evictions does not merit any space, unless large in scale. These threats have cumulatively made slums more vulnerable to evictions; they have also created more challenges for organizers.

The silent threats

Slum-dwellers form a majority population in all the electoral constituencies of Mumbai. All political parties have slum wings. Patron–client relationships among the elected representatives and slum residents are active in almost all slum settlements. Politics needs to be minimally responsive to the concerns of the majority of the electorate. However, this responsiveness is unevenly balanced with a priority to converting Mumbai to Shanghai²² through a complex and multilayered net of policies and programs. This has meant that silent forms of displacement are more actively favored than direct forms that create hostile voters.

The invisible forms of displacement include rehabilitation schemes that compel households to move out of economically unsustainable arrangements, the formalization of public service delivery and its restriction to paying citizens²³ and the shrinking of open access spaces such as gardens, playgrounds²⁴ etc.

22 Mumbai to Shanghai has emerged as a slogan after the adoption of the new development plan that identifies Mumbai's growth potential as an international finance center. It has been a theme picked up by senior politicians and policy-makers who look at Shanghai's rapid growth as a model to emulate.

23 Instances of this include the privatization of water supply, toilets based on pay and use or private mode etc.

24 Gardens and playgrounds which were open for access to larger public are now being converted to a pay and use mode with an implicit restriction on entry of poor citizens.

In the last decade, the discourse on slum development in Mumbai has centered upon redevelopment. This policy that is outwardly successful in creating win-win situations for slum-dwellers, developers, government and the general public has in fact exacerbated the potential of slum lands to generate money and strengthened the play of political, muscle and criminal force in these communities. It has further divided the constituency of slums and made the vulnerable within it almost invisible.

Work spaces of the poor are similarly under threat. The closing down of mills and manufacturing industries in the city through the last ten years have resulted in an increase in the number of people working in the informal sector. In the decade from 1980 to 1990, the proportion of manufacturing employment to total employment reduced from 36.0 to 28.5 percent, and the percentage of informal sector workers rose to 98 percent in Mumbai (MMRDA, 1996). Stopping the issue of new licenses to street vendors, the confinement of hawking spaces²⁵ poses distinct threats for workers seeking refuge in the informal sector.

These invisible forms of displacement make the city an increasingly difficult terrain for the poor. Moreover, these forms interface with each other, attenuating their impact. Contesting these multiple forms of displacement is an extremely difficult challenge for organizers today.

Shifting contours of housing rights struggles

Organizations in Mumbai had pioneered city-level networks and been at the forefront of the National Campaign for Housing Rights (NCHR). However, by early 1990s, the city-level networks of NGOs had become inactive though the NGOs themselves were active or had even become bigger in stature. Activists point out that a lack of grassroots mobilization proved to be the undoing of these networks which became rather associations of the NGOs than the people. The extremely differentiated realities of slums as fractured constituencies, where the threat of displacement was often not active also deterred mobilization efforts. Recourse to political party representatives offered the promise of more assured material benefits to the slum-dwellers. The articulation of housing as a broad right also began to fall short of contesting the multi-quartered assault on spaces of the poor ranging from residential and work spaces, cultural and expressed spaces as well as other forms impinging on lived environment.

²⁵ There are currently no defined spaces for hawking in the city. There is a move to establish zones in which this activity will be confined. Avtaar means incarnation and has religious significance in the literal sense. It refers to a change of form and function.

People under immediate threat of displacement were much more interested in mobilization, but this interest could not build up to a rallied response. However, the most significant factor which proved to be the undoing of struggles based on housing rights was the changed role of the State. The State earlier stood as a guarantor and provider of the substance of human rights. However, in its facilitative 'avtaar',²⁶ the State responsibility was confined to creation of a progressive policy environment; it began to acquire a commercial outlook²⁷ in its operations.

In this context, several erstwhile struggle-oriented organizations sought to partner with the state and private sector; several began to engage with public service delivery (R. Ramnath, unpublished thesis). Their large stature has enabled them to monopolize the space for policy discourse, the space for smaller organizations for the same has steadily decreased. An atmosphere of apolitical, sporadic mobilizations devoid of conflict has emerged in the city over the last decade. Issues that have been taken up are largely localized. With multiple NGOs having diverse interests, there are groups on all sides of the table vis-a-vis any issue.

The impact of the processes outlined above is demonstrated in unfolding of some recent struggles.

- (a) The *Nivara Hakk Suraksha Samiti* (NHSS) (Committee for the Protection of Housing Rights), engaged in a grassroots as well as judicial struggle against evictions in the Sanjay Gandhi National Park, found itself waging an isolated, losing struggle. Its judicial battle was a lost cause due to unsympathetic judges. On the political front, even the support of a former Prime Minister did not yield substantive results as the political party to which he belonged was itself divided on the issue. The long drawn process of evictions in repeated cycles and the prolonged decisions on rehabilitation compelled the NHSS to take on the task of actually executing the rehabilitation of 1200 households considered eligible by the Court. Its engagement in the rehabilitation process has enmeshed NHSS with the tangled web of contested terms of acquisition, development and real estate.
- (b) The initial response to the massive and widespread evictions in October 2004 was one of shock and passive acceptance. In January 2005, nearly two months after the onset of evictions several civil society actions were initiated. These actions saw

26 It is currently estimated that over one-third of slum rehabilitation schemes are sites of conflicts between these various interests.

27 For instance, one of the stated aims of the New Housing Policy of the Government of Maharashtra to which Mumbai belongs is to generate resources for the State treasury.

alliance building between several actors: political parties, trade unions, NGOs, community-based organizations and sympathetic individuals. Some political parties too joined hands with NGOs, adding a new dimension to the struggle. A People's Tribunal organized in January 2005 helped a public expression of anger and distress caused by the evictions. This was subsequently followed by an emergence of resistance on the ground. People started rebuilding on their lands while women took a lead and marched up to their original sites and put up their huts. Bulldozers were stopped and fences were broken. By end of February, eighteen of the twenty-one sites cleared were re-encroached upon. The State Government has been compelled to live up to its electoral promise of tolerating slum-dwelling people up to 2000, although there has been considerable resistance to formalizing²⁸ these decisions on paper. The citizenship rights of these communities are alienated through a denial of ration cards.²⁹ Moreover, the process of reoccupation itself has been fraught with contradictions with vested interests attempting to corner privileges. The number of people who have reclaimed the spaces is much lesser than the number of people who were evicted. Some of these settlements have undergone evictions again; the benefits of rehabilitation have been given to some while others, even eligible for rehabilitation, have been driven away.

About 200,000 slum households are threatened with eviction through some of the current development projects in Mumbai. The ensuing debate is not about the merits of these developments; there is inevitability about it. What is being debated is who gets rehabilitated, where, how and who manages this process of rehabilitation. Several actors including political representatives, NGOs, consultants are already in the fray, seeking a share of the redevelopment bonanza. The housing rights discourse has thus reduced to a redevelopment discourse.

Challenges for organization of slum communities

Several questions about the nature and location of community practice in slums emerge in this disconcerting scenario.

28 Any Government decision can only be implemented after the issue of a resolution that is published in the Government Gazette. The resolution pertaining to extension of tolerance dates up to 2000 was published a year after the assurance was given.

29 A ration card is actually an entitlement to the public distribution for food grains. However, these cards are also treated as proofs of residence. Access to these is therefore important to people seeking to gain a foothold in the city.

The first pertains to the organizers. The experience of the past few years has raised serious concerns about the ability of NGOs to represent the interests of slum-dwellers. NGOs have emerged as stakeholders with independent interests of their own. The large numbers of community-based organizations are factionally divided on the basis of interests. The issue of housing rights of slum-dwellers has been politicized through the years and almost every political party has a slum wing as of today. These political representatives are prominent actors in issues around slum development, but they also have interests in cultivating slums as their vote banks perpetually obligated to them thereby dividing communities and preventing a larger struggle for housing rights to become a strong and effective force. There is thus a tremendous credibility crisis of organizers involved in these issues.

The challenge of the scale at which new threats to survival of slum-dwellers operate is even greater. Each slum land is today a contestation between political, criminal and privileged interests. Combating these threats through local organizations based on associations of disadvantaged people in slums is an uphill task compelling organizations to work through alliances and coalitions. Alliance building in this context is an extremely slippery terrain. It raises several uncomfortable questions and dilemmas. Can coalitions be built on local agendas while overlooking the value base of partners? To what extent could community organizations engage in politics of stealth (Benjamin, 2004) themselves without losing their credibility? Who should be the primary actor in coalitions? What kind of arrangements and structures are required to maintain the disadvantaged as primary negotiators?

Some of the threats discussed earlier are silent; they are couched as benefits to slum-dwellers. They are promoted by few residents of slum communities themselves. Combating such threats often necessitates working against the interests of these people, creating dilemmatic situations.

Slums are themselves emerging as sites where multiple classes are present. What is the form and nature of community practice that is required to do justice to more disadvantaged groups like the tenants; homeless, single women who do not even have access to a slum house?

Conclusion

Community practice in slums of Mumbai began with a faith in locality development. Tools and means of development were seen as broad-based participation of the community and the enhancement of collaborative practices within it. It then took the form of struggles for housing rights. In the current scenario, the conventional tools and forms of participation are not only proving weak but these same tools; terms are being invoked as threats to the very survival of slum settlements in the city. The crisis that is thus

emerging in community practice is thus a crisis of defining both community practice and its knowledge base in the context of a globalizing city.

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