

## Missing an Inclusionary Vision for the Urban Poor

### What is the issue?

The Tamil Nadu government has released the “**Resettlement and Rehabilitation Policy**” for public comment but it is based on a tired model of peripheral resettlement that fails on social justice.

### What is the Resettlement and Rehabilitation Policy about?

- The draft policy aims to ensure that slum dwellers are treated fairly and humanely when they are resettled from objectionable poromboke lands.
- The policy states that it is applicable to encroachment, eviction and displacement undertaken by the departments, statutory authorities and local bodies under various acts and rules.
- The distance from nearest towns or source of employment must be considered to identify land for resettlement.
- Slum dwellers must be accommodated only in areas from where it won't take more than half an hour to reach the nearest urban areas by bus or train.
- The policy mandated the formation of “**Resettlement Committees**” for each resettlement scheme with representation of women, Scheduled Castes, and Scheduled Tribes and voluntary organisations apart from officials from different departments.
- It also mandated the constitution of **State-level and District-level Habitat Development Committees** for inter-departmental coordination, creating basic amenities, delivery of welfare schemes, and redress grievances.
- Lands affected by industrial pollution, environmental degradation, and lands that fell under buffer zones of ecologically sensitive zones must be avoided as resettlement locations.
- It provides for an entitlement matrix which includes subsistence allowance, shifting allowance, employment assistance, availability of public facilities like anganwadis, community halls etc.
- The policy also focussed on capacity building to sensitise officials on the issues involved in the resettlement and conduct of social audit after two years of resettlement.

## **Why the approach of the policy is considered narrow?**

- The policy is premature and is not anchored in a comprehensive housing and habitat policy that defines a framework for affordable housing, slum clearance, and land use.
- The policy restricts its scope to managing procedures for eviction and resettlement and lacks a clear vision of integration and inclusion of vulnerable communities into the mainstream.
- Since a large proportion of urban land across Indian cities lack legal title, the policy builds on a foundation of widespread vulnerability to eviction without recourse.
- The poorly serviced colonies on the peripheries of cities are highlighted in places such as Bawana (New Delhi), Vatwa (Ahmedabad), and Mahul (Mumbai), etc.
- Broken livelihoods, alcohol and substance abuse, criminalisation of youth, and safety threats to women and girls are also endemic to these sites.
- Many residents sell or rent out their allotments and return to informal settlements in the city.
- Regarding the travel time, the nearest urban area could be a small town and a resettlement colony sited a 30-minute bus ride from a small town can effectively ruralise urban workers.
- High drop-out rates of women from the labour force and children from schools have been the norm in these colonies.

## **What is the history of inclusionary models of slum clearance in Tamil Nadu?**

- Tamil Nadu historically led the country in providing large-scale low-income housing through land acquisition or by regularising and upgrading informal settlements.
- The projects of 1980s produced around 57,000 plots in Chennai which are scaleable, cost-effective, and successful in facilitating socio-economic mobility of the residents over long term.
- The projects built mixed-class and mixed-use neighbourhoods by providing plots of varying sizes for different income groups on State-acquired land, and incorporating industrial and commercial spaces within the sites.
- These schemes vastly expanded the supply of affordable housing over time with minimal outlay by the State as families were allowed to design, build, and incrementally expand their homes.
- Despite their peripheral location, they were built near existing developments where trunk infrastructure such as roads, water supply and

public transport was already available.

### How can a holistic policy be achieved?

- **Minimal disruption** - A resettlement policy dealing with the city's most vulnerable populations must be visionary, proactive, far-sighted and should ensure minimal disruption of the ecologies of survival and mobility.
- Delhi's slum rehabilitation policy recognises this by defining *in situ* rehabilitation as its principle strategy and relocation is envisaged only in rare cases.
- **Land rights** - Odisha's award-winning slum rehabilitation project which aims to transform urban economies and futures by giving land rights to slum dwellers can be looked upon.
- **Real commitments to integration** - A clear provision of the maximum distance from the previous residence will be better.
- The Delhi policy, for instance, specifies that the alternate accommodation will be provided within a radius of 5 km.
- **Adequate amenities** - A sensitive policy would build measures to ensure the adequacy, quality and timeliness of amenities in resettlement sites.
- Transport facilities must comprise adequate, reliable and affordable arrangements before resettlement to ensure that workers seamlessly maintain their links to their workplaces.
- **Beyond skill development** - Livelihood support cannot simply mean skill development training which almost surely will not translate into employment for an over-40-year-old vendor from the city.
- An effective policy must engage seriously with the complex problems that render these settlements unsafe for women, children and youth.

### Reference

1. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/tn-releases-draft-resettlement-and-rehabilitation-policy/article36975078.ece>
2. <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/missing-an-inclusionary-vision-for-the-urban-poor/article37569210.ece>