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# SLUMS AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION

View from the Global South

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## Abstract

*The debates involving origin and persistence of slums in urban areas are situated on a continuum of causal justifications. Some view them as a governance issue, others situate them as a problem in housing affordability and land administration regimes. Notwithstanding the polemical debates around their origin, slums are a veritable reality of the contemporary urbanizing world that require effective management. There has been a convergence of views among international governance institutions, community-based organizations (CBOs) and the national and local governments that the 'slum problem' needs effective management. This imperative has taken various forms in different policy settings ranging from outright eviction, resettlement and in-situ upgrading of the slums. Drawing on the Lefebvre's (1968) 'right to the city' this manuscript argues that slum management practices often involve physical improvement and economic enhancement of the slums and do not, necessarily, lead to social integration of the slum dwellers into the wider societies. The slums residents continue to experience social inequality and live at margins of social life even if their material circumstances have been improved through such interventions. This paper reviews peer reviewed empirical studies and substantiates the argument with lessons from different slum management programs from around the globe. The emphasis on social inclusion of the slum residents has a direct bearing on the prospects of welfare and social mobility of the slum dwellers and social harmony within the society at large. Drawing on the capabilities approach as proposed by Amartya Sen (1992) and fleshed out by Nussbaum (2003), this essay advocates putting into practice holistic slum management interventions that prioritize social integration of the slum dwellers and do not conceive such interventions only in physical and material domain.*

## Introduction

Slums are sites of socio-spatial disadvantage with inadequate infrastructure and services. Slum formation is a complex phenomenon and is correlated with myriad of factors such as governance structures, urbanization, availability of land, housing policy, and availability of jobs in a given area (UN-Habitat, 2016). Notwithstanding the currency of many debates on their emergence, slums are a veritable reality of today, at least in the global south, and provide shelter to one billion people (UN-Habitat, 2016). Irrespective of their contribution to the productivity of the city (Glaesar & Xiong, 2017; Harvey, 2007), the slum dwellers live at the fringes of socio-cultural and economic life of the society (D'souza, 1979; Roy, 2011) as inferior 'others'. They are a lot of stigmatized, marginalized, criminalized and invisible poor that constitute a 'problem' called the 'slum' which needs a 'civilizing' hand of the state (Alhidayat Siban, 2020; D'souza, 1979; Hancock & Mooney, 2012; Perlman, 2007.; Roy, 2011). There is a progressive realization that slums should not be left unattended into the rapidly urbanizing future that might see a population of three billion slum dwellers by 2050 mostly in megacities of global south (UN-Habitat, 2016). Efforts are, therefore, underway to deal with the 'problem' of slums.

Efforts to 'effectively' deal with the slums have gathered momentum since the post-war years in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Though context specific, slum management strategies have involved outright clearance, resettlement, and in-situ upgradation of the slums (UN-Habitat, 2016). Seeing the slum formation and their management practices through Lefebvre's (1968) 'right to the city', it is argued that slum management strategies often entail physical improvement and economic enhancement of the slums. Such strategies do not, necessarily, lead to social integration of the slum dwellers into the wider societies. Resultantly, the slum dwellers continue to experience social exclusion and live at the margins of social life even if their material circumstances have been improved. The essay reviews literature around slum management strategies in the global south to substantiate the argument. The social integration and social exclusion are understood from Arthurson (2004) as the degree to which slum dwellers have access to social networks and support systems within the larger society outside the slums that might enable their access to resources, democratic decision making and common cultural practices. The argument is furthered in the hope that it might afford a better understanding of the slums and reiterate slum dweller's position as right bearing citizens who have a stake in the city.

The manuscript is structured as follows. Following this introduction, the discussion flows into exposition of Lefebvre's 'right to the city' as framework for production of urban space. The next section reviews different slum management strategies including slum clearance, resettlement and in-situ upgrading citing case studies along the way to argue their inefficacy in improving social integration of the slum dwellers. Following such framing, the discussion section reflects on the lessons from the cited case studies and advocates the use of Amartya

Sen's Capability Approach (1992) as expounded by (Nussbaum, 2003) as a policy evaluation framework. This is followed by a conclusion and outlining of wider implications of such an argument. Slums and informal settlements are used interchangeably in this essay and understood as settlements that lack one or more of the services such as security of tenure, access to improved sanitation, drinking water, or sufficient dwelling space (UN-Habitat, 2016). Moreover, the essay focuses only on the slums in global south and do not extend the argument to global north although such undertaking is hindered by the word limit of this essay and not by the dearth of parallels between the two.

## **Right to the city: a normative ideal**

Lefebvre's (1968) 'right to the city' approach has elicited transcendental interest of theorists from across the disciplines. Reflecting on the post-war urban regeneration of the Paris, and the displacement of the poor carried out in its wake, Lefebvre (1968) proposed a theory that sees space as a social production. He sees spatial injustice as the reflection of unequal social relations within the larger society and advocates for extension of the right to the production of space to all segments of the society irrespective of their social status. He conceives lived space as a combination of perceived (physical) and conceived (ideas about the space) and argues that "Lived space is not just a passive stage on which social life unfolds but represents a constituent element of social life" (Lefebvre, 1968, p. 39).

Lefebvre's legacy continues to date in many disciplines. Drawing on Lefebvre's work, geographers have coined terms such as 'uneven development' (Marcuse, 2009; Smith 1991; Soja, 1989), urban economists have castigated capitalistic 'accumulation by dispossession' (Harvey; 1973; Castells, 1977), sociologists have analyzed social basis of power (Logan and Molotch, 1987) and explained spatial segregation based on class and race (Massey and Denton, 1993). Political scientists, (Mollenkopf, 1983; Stone, 1989) argue power differentials and pro-growth business elites as a reason behind destruction of low-income communities. Slums, thus, seem a physical manifestation of the unequal geography of capitalism that results from denial of its residents' right to the production of urban space. Economic marginalization and spatial marginalization seem mutually reinforcing but it is the social exclusion that seems intractable once the slum dwellers are stuck in a place. Right to the city approach clarifies social exclusion of the slum dwellers by placing 'place' at the intersection of wider societal processes. It is the denial of the slum dweller's right to the city that takes shape as slum management strategies such as slum clearance.

## **Have slum management strategies delivered on their promises?**

### **a) Slum Clearance**

Slums clearance, as a strategy, followed a period of benign neglect of slums in many countries of the post-war 20<sup>th</sup> century. The post-industrial revolution city did not see slums as a problem rather saw them as necessary for the economic productivity of the city (UN-Habitat,

2003). The belief that slums would disappear with economic growth did not let the city authorities provide them with basic services and even did not show them on the maps (Wekwete, 1997). However, the later realization that slums would not disappear automatically saw forced evictions of the slum dwellers towards the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Forced evictions involve removal of people from their homes against their will (Olds et al. 2002). Sometimes these evictions are couched in humanitarian diction such as “action aimed at integrating fragmented and disorderly urban space and improving the living conditions of the residents” (Magalhaes, 2013, p.113). In 2004, such a ‘humanitarian action’ displaced 40,000 people in Zimbabwe (Cohre & Achr, 2004), uprooted 170,000 people from *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro in the period leading up to the 2016 Rio Olympics (Ivester, 2017). Such a strategy displaced millions in Delhi during preparations for the 2010 Commonwealth games in India (Dupont, 2008). The strategy continues to varying degree in various parts of the world and the evictions continue to make headlines in Brazil (Nuijten, 2013; Perlman, 2007), Argentina (Memolo, 2017), Dhaka (Begum & Moinuddin, 2010), Turkey and Indonesia (Alhidayatus Sibyan, 2020) and Islamabad, Pakistan. What goes missing in these headlines is the social exclusion of the slum dwellers resulting from denial of their ‘right to the city’.

Slum clearance complicates social problems instead of solving them. Harvey (1973) while commenting on the urban regeneration programmes in the west cites Engles to argue that “the bourgeoisie solution to housing the poor is to dispossess them” (p.175). Such dispossession has devastated the lives of millions and permanently nudged them to the margins of the society. The dehumanizing emotional trauma, loss of social connections and economic base resulting from such operations pushes the evictees further down the poverty ladder and excludes them socially. Dupont, (2008) traces how the evictees of slums in Delhi (India) returned to other slums in the city and faced repeated evictions at the hands of the authorities. Ivester, (2017) cites a resident facing eviction threat in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil as saying, “we are not just talking about houses or place to live. We are talking about more than fifty years of being neighbours, we have our own culture here”. So, slum clearance is not only dehumanizing and fails to solve the ‘problem’ it also adds to the precarity and social exclusion of the slum dwellers, thus, necessitating a room for other strategies.

## **b) Resettlement**

Resettlement entails relocating slum dwellers to other locations after clearance of the slums. The epistemology of slum as a ‘problem’ does not change in such strategy rather the mode of dealing with the problem changes. Instead of providing urban services at their places of residence, slum dwellers are relocated to dwellings, often, away from the productive city centres and away from the established social contacts. Resettlements are often justified by utilitarianism of neoliberalism as an exercise in ensuring greatest good for the greatest number of people. It does not care even if a minority is pushed down the liveability ladder because of such undertaking (Fainstein, 2014). International events such as sports

tournaments, summit meetings of the heads of the states etc. afford a perfect opportunity for such relocations (Dupont, 2008; Ivester, 2017). The need to hide the shabby underbelly of the city, that is the slum, is even more necessary at such events to showcase the glittery image of the city for enhancing its entrepreneurial potential. Slum dwellers' 'otherness' in such strategies and relocations is reflected through authorities' requirement of commitments of 'civilized behaviour' from the slum dwellers in their new homes (Alhidayatus Sibyan, 2020; Memolo, 2017; Nuijten, 2013).

Resettlements have often failed to deliver on their declared objectives and social integration of slum dwellers into the society. Lessons from resettlement programmes in Brazil (Nuijten, 2013), Argentina (Memolo, 2017), Turkey (Alhidayatus Sibyan, 2020) and San Roque Manilla (Jensen et al., 2020) suggest that housing slum dwellers away from their established abodes is not a solution to the problem. The loss of economic base, network of social relations (Maria et al., 2015) after displacement to far off locations, often, involving long commutes to the city further exacerbates the socio-spatial disadvantage of the slum dwellers. The slum dwellers continue to yearn to become a part of the 'city' even in their newly provided houses. Nuijten, (2013) reports how the residents of the Jacerpinge favela in Recife, Brazil continued to aspire to be a part of the *cidade* (the city) after relocation to their new 'homes' and how they deliberately tried to dress appropriately when visiting the city in a bid to try not look like a *favelado* (slum dweller). The city looked like a frightening place to them as many had unpleasant experiences at the hands of police, a routine criminalization of slum dwellers reported in other settings too (Perlman, 2007). They often missed their homes which they had built themselves. Similar accounts have been reported by Ivester (2017) from Villa Autodromo in Brazil and Alhidayatus Sibyan (2020) from Turkey where the resettled communities yearned for the familiar neighbours in their previous communities and complained of the lost economic base and the regularity of the utility bills. Ivester (2017) quotes a resident of the villa Autodromo in Brazil who after inspecting his new home, which was much smaller than the previous one, fretted, "it is not the dream, but it is a good house, on the other hand, we miss so many now". Thus, such a strategy seems inadequate in integrating slum dwellers into the social fabric of the city.

### c) In-situ upgrading

The in-situ upgrading of the slums is a widely advocated strategy to manage the slum problem. Such a strategy has been advocated by the United Nations (UN-Habitat, 2016) and Community Based Organisations (CBO) such as Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI). The cynical views situate the recent neoliberal advocacy of the in-situ upgrading due to its concern for the loss in productivity of the city resulting from the eviction or resettlement of the slum dwellers away from the city (2007). Others attribute this radical shift towards in-situ upgrading to John Turner's views on housing, which see housing as an activity (Werlin, 1999; Pugh, 2000). Fichter et al. (1972) viewed housing as an activity, a verb, and argued

that housing can be used as a productive activity rather than a social cost. They see merit in such strategy if done in a participatory manner as it could impart psychological wellbeing, pride, sense of competence and sense of identity to the residents. Through in-situ upgrading, slums are upgraded through provision of infrastructure and services and formalization of tenure on the existing dwellings in the hope that slum dwellers would incrementally improve their homes. Though there are contextual variations, the UN-Habitat (2003) and SDI emphasize participatory slum upgrading programs (PSUP). There have been concerns, however, about branding slum dwellers as a homogenous community and warnings that ignoring such diversity might further entrench disadvantage of the ultra-marginalized within the slums through elite capture of the participatory processes (Rigon, 2014; Roy, 2005).

In-situ upgrading of the slums has been successful in many settings, but the fact remains that it sees slums in purely housing terms. Material conditions do improve and there have been instances from Dhaka, Bangladesh (Begum and Moinuddin, 2010), Kampung improvement program (KIP) of Indonesia (Das, 2007), Growth Accelerated Program (PAC) of Brazil (Memolo, 2017), and other programs in different parts of the world where material conditions have improved. But the issue of social integration of the slum dwellers remains elusive to achieve. Reports from Bogota, Columbia (Gilbert, 2002) indicates that the conferment of land titles to slum dwellers did not improve their access to formal credit market. Rather, the valorization of the property prices after such formalization of tenures resulted in gentrification of such locales, a process in which poor are pushed out of their dwellings only to be replaced by the economically well-off residents (Marcuse, 2009; Memolo, 2017; Perlman, 2007.; Slater, 2009). The exchange value conferred to properties after formalization becomes a lucrative asset for economically marginalized slum dwellers having a thin resilience to economic shocks who use it at the first instance of need. Such a gentrification has also been reported in Indonesia's KIP (Das, 2007) and favelas of Brazil (Perlman, 2007). Perlman, (2007), reports the results of a 30 year long longitudinal study from three favelas in Rio de Janeiro. She interviewed 250 residents in 1968-69 and again 41% of that sample in 2005. She reports that while the material conditions of the favelas have been improved over this period, the human conditions have been deteriorated. She further reports that the enhanced access to education has not translated into no jobs at all or only low rung and menial jobs at best. Such results have also been reported from Bangaluru, India (Krishna, 2013) where interviews of 1431 slum dwellers yielded similar results. Reporting an interesting statistic, Perlman (2007) highlights that the income returns to education between favela and non-favela residents increases with each additional year of schooling. She declares that the stigma of living in the *favelas* is more pernicious than that of colour, class or gender. She argues that such slum upgrading programmes have not resulted into social integration of the slums dwellers as the favela dwellers' quest to be a 'gente' (a person) continues from 1968-2005, over three generations, at least.

## Have the existing strategies mitigated social exclusion?

The social exclusion of the slum dwellers seems tenacious, at least for now. This tenacity might have to do with how slums are perceived, a land use issue, an issue in housing affordability, uneven access to economic opportunities or spatial representation of wider social relations within a society. Critics of the current slum upgrading schemes hold out that such schemes treat symptoms rather than the underlying malaise. They cite the failure of the economic incentives of the American New Deal programmes in ending social, racial and class segregation the African Americans in 1960s and 1970s (Rainwater, 1974) that also holds true in United Kingdom as well (Hancock & Mooney, 2012). Others, while also appreciating the intentions of the slum upgrading programmes declare that in actuality, “provision of services and up-grading of slums, is a bit like rearranging the chairs on the deck of titanic” (Auyero, 1999, P. 15). Such policies, according to them, undermine the centrality of spatiality in determining social outcomes and vice-versa (Soja, 1999). Do such policies and interventions affirm the right to the city of the slum dwellers? Do this amount to co-creation of the urban space? Do they do away with the social base of the power relations? Do the participatory practices assign same epistemological authority to diversity of slum dwellers voices? What are the reasons that social capital and the social integration of the slum dwellers continues to fray even when their material conditions have somewhat improved? Can such outcomes be quantified with the current tools of cost-benefit analyses that see costs and benefits in material terms? Would a miraculous upstaging of neoliberalism by Marxist communism deliver better outcomes? Fainstein (2014) quotes Simmel (1950) who argues that social hierarchies existed even within the actually existing communism. Where does the solution lie then?

## Capability Approach: a possible way forward

Sen's (1992) capability approach offers promising prospects for working through the existing system. Sen, furthering the debates around social justice, problematizes Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as an indicator for growth. He advocates for enhancing capabilities of people and removing barriers in acquisition of their desired goals in life. In doing so, he rejects utilitarian conception of subjective satisfaction and quality of life by arguing that people might have adaptive preferences, like women in many countries reconcile to their second-class status. Sen argues that we happen to encounter barriers to achieving our preferred state only when we undertake to achieve that state. In his conception, in a just society, the state stands to confer such capabilities to citizens which might constitute genuine progress. The beauty of Sen's approach lies in its accommodation of the diversity in the society. For example, a disabled person would need more resources than an able-bodied person to achieve same level of capabilities. Expanding Sen's work further Nussbaum (2003) adumbrates a tentative list of ten capabilities that citizens of a just society are required to have for normal functioning of a just society. This approach advocates development of capabilities around

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broader areas such as life, bodily integrity, sense, imagination thought, emotions, practical reason, and affiliation. For example, the capabilities under the ‘affiliation’ category recognize the right of every human being to have social basis of self-respect, non-humiliation and being able to be treated as a dignified and worthy whose worth is equal to that of others. Fainstein (2014) advocate for evaluation of urban policy and reckons only those urban policies successful that improve the plight of the worst off.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the social integration of the slum integration remains elusive in most societies even when there has been material improvement in the slum environs. This essay employed Lefebvre’s ‘right to the city’ approach to understand the social exclusion of the slum dwellers in many cultural and policy settings in many parts of the global south. The centrality of space in determining social outcomes seems formidable and translates into social marginalization of many slum dwellers. The inability of slum management strategies such as ‘slum clearance’, ‘resettlement’, and ‘in-situ upgrading’ to socially integrate slum dwellers into the wider society raises questions about utility of such strategies in dealing with the ‘slum problem’. The slums could have been reintegrated into the wider societies after investments to improve their material conditions. But evidence suggests that such economic rationality is flawed in many cases, and slum dwellers continue to live at the intersections of social, spatial, and economic margins of the society. The arguments around social basis of power and the right to the city approach offer a promising understanding of the entire issue. The essay argued that such right to the city can be concretized and integrated into the urban policy through Sen’s capability approach as specified by Martha Nussbaum. Such a framework would measure progress through enhancing capabilities of people to be what they want to be and measure progress through improvement in the lot of the worst off in the society. There is a need for further research to explore the contours of a society where residential address of people would not work to their disadvantage.

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