

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LEGAL STUDIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES [IJLSSS]

ISSN: 2584-1513 (Online)

Volume 3 | Issue 5 [2025] | Page 56 - 62

© 2025 International Journal of Legal Studies and Social Sciences

Follow this and additional works at: <https://www.ijlsss.com/>

In case of any queries or suggestions, kindly contact editor@ijlsss.com

URBAN SHADOWS: A HOLISTIC STUDY OF SLUMS IN INDIA AND THE STRUGGLE FOR DIGNIFIED LIVING

- Anurag ¹

“Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice.” - *Nelson Mandela*

WHY SLUMS MATTER?

Behind every sparkling Indian city there are unseen streets, tiny homes of tin, brick and multiple dreams. There live millions of people who make the city alive, they cook its meals, build its offices, sweep its buildings, drive its rickshaws, sort out its waste. But these same people often have no clean water, no safe houses, no good toilets, no proper electricity and even no fresh air to breathe. Someone has spoken the truth that “A city’s soul is measured by how it treats its weakest residents.”

The United Nations estimates that about 1.1 billion people worldwide live in slums or slum-like settings today. As the world becomes increasingly urban, this could double by 2050. For India, which is increasing its urban population at a rate greater than almost any other country, it is not just a housing issue - it is an issue of rights, health, and dignity of the people of slum.

WHAT COUNTS AS A SLUM?

A slum can be defined as a densely populated area where people live in a bad living conditions and often lacking basic amenities like clean water, sanitation, electricity, etc. Their homes are often overcrowded with weak, damaged or temporary structures. People of Slums have limited access to education, healthcare, and formal jobs. They are informal settlements, usually without

¹ Year of Study- 5th, Atal Bihari Vajpayee School of Legal Studies, CSJM University

legal recognition or proper infrastructure. Although the definition of a slum varies from country to country.

Worldwide, a slum residence is defined by not having one or more of the following facilities :

- Safe drinking water
- Adequate sanitation
- Durable shelter (solid walls, roof, floor)
- Adequate living space (not overcrowding)
- Security of tenure (legal right to stay)

As per the 2011 Census, about 65.5 million Indians roughly equal to France's population lived in slums, and they are spread across 13.9 million households. These households make up 17% of the country's urban population (17 per cent of the population lived in what it defined as "dwellings that are unfit for human habitation"), with around 3.6 million people living on rent. At the same time, urban India had about 11 million vacant homes.

In 2016, the Foundations Strategy Group (FSG) estimated that about 26 to 37 million families live in informal housing, like slums or houses built without proper permission.

LIFE IN A SLUM

Slum life means to encounter several challenges on a day-to-day basis:

- Space: Families of five or more usually live in a single or double small room.
- Sanitation: Decades of people share toilets or they just do not exist.
- Water: Shared taps or tanker supply is the norm, typically unreliable. Usually, tap water is available for only one or two hours a day.
- Health: Overcrowding and absence of proper drainage allow disease to spread more quickly that's why people of slum are mostly sufferer of disease like tuberculosis, dengue, and diarrhoea.
- Education: Local schools lack resources and are overcrowded.

- **Work:** Work is very informal daily wage labour, street selling, tailoring, scrap metal collection thus no security of job and little stability of income.

When illness strikes or eviction is threatened, the impact is immediate and devastating. For many, a bad week can mean losing home and means of livelihood. Living in slum is like battling with life everyday. The future is really unpredictable, and no one can be certain of what tomorrow will bring.

WHAT REPORTS AND DATA TELL US

HOUSING SHORTFALL

India's official urban housing shortage was officially estimated last by the Ministry of Housing (2012) at 18.78 million units. More recent expert estimates now place the shortage at over 25 million units after adjusting for migration and urban growth.

GOVERNMENT ACTION

The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana - Urban (PMAY-U), launched in 2015, aims to deliver "Housing for All" by 2024. Based on the PMAY MIS dashboard (July 2025):

- 119.31 lakh houses sanctioned
- 93.81 lakh houses completed (~78.6% rate of completion)

PMAY-U is India's largest housing scheme till date. As of June 2021, some 11.2 million houses have been sanctioned under PMAY-U, of which 4.8 million have been completed.

While this is significant, millions remain out of the net due to land conflict, terms of eligibility, or poor project locations far from job opportunities.

WHAT THE COURTS HAVE SAID

Indian courts have explained multiple times through its judgement that housing, good environment, right to food, right to clean drinking water, and right to basic need is connected with the Right to Life (Article 21) of the Indian Constitution, 1950.

1. In *Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation (1985)*, the Supreme Court of India held that eviction of pavement dwellers without notice is a violation of their right to livelihood. Livelihood and shelter are inseparable.

2. As held in the popular case of *Chameli Singh v. State of U.P. (1995)*, the honourable Court ruled that the State has to rehabilitate the people before evicting them since housing is basic to dignity. These principles clearly show that forced eviction without any equitable rehabilitation is unacceptable in the eye of law.

However, there are many demolitions still taking place that are not up to code.

DHARAVI REDEVELOPMENT - A CASE IN MOTION

Asia's biggest slum, Dharavi, Mumbai is home to around 1 million people and thousands of small industries manufacturing around USD 1 billion annually. Redevelopment has been discussed for decades, but in the recent past, development proceeded at a faster pace.

LEGAL UPDATES

- In 2024, a PIL against the use of salt-pan land for Dharavi rehabilitation was rejected by the Bombay High Court.
- The Supreme Court has declined to halt the redevelopment entirely, permitting it to proceed while the disputes are resolved.

RESIDENT CONCERNS

- Fears of exclusion for lack of documents.
- Home-based businesses and workshops will lose space.

- The possibility of relocation far away from workplaces and schools.

Dharavi is the example of the two-edged sword of redevelopment that it can provide better housing only if it protects identity, work, and social networks.

RECURRING PROBLEMS IN REDEVELOPMENT

From Dharavi to Delhi's Kathputli Colony, certain issues appear again and again:

- Long-term residents get disqualified because they do not have the proper documents.
- Families get trapped in transit homes for years due to unacceptably long delays.
- The government and builders have all the bargaining power and thus an imbalance is created.
- Corruption and weak monitoring reduce quality.

TOWARDS A HUMANE FRAMEWORK - A PRACTICAL CHECKLIST

A humane and effective slum redevelopment policy should consist of:

- Surveys must be open to scrutiny, have beneficiary lists that are publicly accessible, and grievance processes that are transparent.
- Rehabilitation must precede demolition with rehousing locally, as recommended by courts.
- Construction should be done in phases so that residents can move directly from existing to new homes without extended displacement.
- Free legal counsel and elected resident committees must be provided to assist in negotiations.
- Financial accounts and building progress must be publicly audited and revealed.

EXAMPLES AND SOLUTIONS - INDIA AND ABROAD

“We need more urgent action and greater investment to provide affordable housing to all - alongside access to electricity, water, sanitation, transport, and other basic services.” ~ *António Guterres* (United Nations Secretary-General)

INDIA

- *India Ahmedabad Slum Networking Project* : In situ upgradation of water, sanitation, and roads with people’s participation, 60 slums were upgraded with basic amenities such as water, sanitation, and roads between 1996 and 2010. In addition, the residents were issued certificates assuring them that they would not be evicted for the next 10 years. This scheme had several advantages, such as improved health, increased work productivity, enhanced literacy, increased disposable income, improved mental well-being, and greater expenditure on housing and education.
- *Kerala's LIFE Mission* : The LIFE Mission housing scheme is a state program in Kerala that has been undertaken to provide housing to landless and homeless people of the state with an objective to build 4.3 lakh houses in five years.

INTERNATIONAL

- *Thailand's Baan Mankong Programme* : Upgrading with tenure security and microfinance community-led.
- *Brazil's Favela-Bairro Project* : The Favela Bairro Project operated in Rio de Janeiro from 1994 to 2008 to treat favelas as formal city neighbourhoods and offer basic services. The municipality relocated residents from risky hillside shacks to new brick homes with electricity, water, and sanitation, offering some legal land rights. In the Complexo de Alemão favela slum, 26,000 residents received clean water, drainage, street lighting, broader roads, pavements, and lawful electricity, enhancing safety, access, and services.

This shows in-place upgrading is usually better than mass clearance.

THE ROLE OF STUDENTS, CITIZENS, AND ACTIVISTS

Citizens may contribute by volunteering with NGOs, observing housing projects, backing small enterprises, and utilizing academic research to partner with slum communities to achieve sustainable, long-term development.

CONCLUSION - SELECTING DIGNITY IN CITIES

Slums are not urban mistakes to be erased, they are living communities. The people who live there are constructions workers, cleaners, sellers, dressmakers, teachers of the city's future and above all else they are human beings. The law stipulates that evictions have to be reasonable, and rehabilitation has to be the goal. The task now is to turn these words into realities building homes that protect livelihoods, preserve communities, and hold real dignity. Dharavi stands at a crossroads: it will be either a model of inclusive urban renewal or a warning story of displacement. Slums deserve dignity, rights, and urgent action for a better tomorrow.