

# Rethinking Cities in the Global South: Envision of the Smart Cities and the Urban Poor

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**Abstract**—Urban Planning theory in India has involved becoming distant and compartmentalized to the interests of the poor and their empowerment through participation is still in infancy. The urban poor should be given space to work as equal partners in the urban development, through increased participation; advanced used of technology in data management and private sector participation. The optimization that needs to be achieved in context of planning should be based on the principle that cities are not a function of these planning and alternately, the planning should be a function of the demographic and socio-political arrangements of a city. With the above background the Paper would elaborate on the Multiple aspects of the Challenge; Better, inclusive governance as a vital step towards sustainable cities; Exclusion of Urban Poor in Urban Planning Process with reference to a case study of a city

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The city is now at the forefront of all development and planning agenda. In Indian context, the history of planning and that of cities is not very old. Though equality has always remained as the hidden objective of planning, it was only the 11th five-year plan which explicitly stated the agenda of Inclusive Growth. Various triggers for the urbanization have been identified among which the most dominant one has been fast growth of service sector.

The unprecedented pace of urbanization poses a serious planning challenge. Urban India requires a planning mechanism which is not only dynamic but also responsive to the needs of all sections of society. The age of the “Master Plans” withered away as the role of the State as a welfare body reduced and the role of capital markets increased and high jacked the scope of planning that could be fostered by the State.

The current approach towards planning, as is evident by the City-Development Plans sought through missions like JNNURM, Smart City Initiative, focus more on making cities world class through infrastructure, up gradation and expansion with less thrust on upliftment of the status of the urban poor. At the core lies the question – For whom is the planning done for essentially, and how “Inclusive” it is. In unpacking the vision of the world class, the author Darshini Mahadevia

propounds that “the visions of what makes a city World Class” are fairly common; a city with elevated highways (freeways), with zipping modern cars and an elevated monorail through the central city, tall glass buildings.... equivalent to modern infrastructure [1]. This planning strategy poses a serious challenge on the nature of urban development that Indian cities are taking course of, within the context of rising urban poverty.

## 2. MULTIPLE ASPECTS OF THE CHALLENGE

The world class city transformations encourage the privatization of services and infrastructure that are driven by the market oriented growth order, which induce withdrawal of state from urban development, increasing gentrification, ghettoisation [2]. Such transitions in urban spaces create segmentation among localities, as no role of urban poor in urban planning is identified, making it an exclusionist approach.

In the process of making Indian cities world class, planning mechanism have made privatization and public private partnership as the popular modes of providing infrastructure services. More fiscal attention is diverted to creation of mega-infrastructure in contrast to the needs of urban poverty alleviation. This World Class City view of planning has brought forward a series of consequences, some of which are discussed below

- **Social Aspect:** The need for land acquisition and setting up for mega infrastructure for urban transport, Malls and Stadia and other sports utilities, etc has seen multiple consequences on the urban poor and resulted in mass evictions and displacement of people from their native sites without due compensation or care. The infrastructure projects that we are referring to are a specific class of infrastructure which is created with the aim of escalating the “world class city vision” for the metros. The current neo-liberal driven development discourse shuns out and calls for removal of slums which tarnish the world class image.

- **Economic Aspects:** The city, demands more land for infrastructure projects and the key drivers for this demand are the increase in investment and private sector participation – that translate into huge profits for private sector directly or indirectly. This means the encroached lands are not only snatched away from the urban poor, they are effectively excluded for deriving any benefits from the return that can accrue from the infrastructure created. This deepens the chasm of the elite and the “deprived” further creating a fractured society where haves and have-nots are distinctly defined.
- **Political Aspects:** It also throws light on the perspective the government has taken and the direction towards the urban public policy is being implemented. Attracting FDI and investments seems to be on the sole priority of the local governments with less concern for the poor who are reduced to mere vote banks for local politicians.
- **Ecological Issues:** Rapid urbanization has created stress on the ecological resources of cities, resulting into poverty-related environmental problems. The effect is dual though. Firstly, the fast paced migration leads to swelling of city size, which stresses on the ecological resources and secondly the apathy of government lets further deterioration of living conditions in slums, due to lack of interventions in areas of sanitation, housing conditions, water provisioning and safe drinking water.
- **Cultural Aspects:** Culturally the World Class City is a mirage, because it beckons an illusory image of city that is “sanitized” of slums, replete of magnificent airports and megastructures, but has no room to accommodate the daily wagger on the expense of which the city runs and survives. A non-accommodative nature of this vision veils the reality of a city under a garb of glamour. Much like the hoardings put up during Commonwealth Games 2011, Delhi – hid the slum dwellers away from sight of the foreign tourists.

The most direct and indirect social, economic, political and cultural implications of this challenge arise from the lack of need based incentive to weave the urban poor into the fabric of the city.

Due to this reason the urban poverty is on a rise and infrastructure provisions catering to their needs are inadequate. Traditionally the public sector has played a vital role in the setting up of infrastructure projects and basic services, but due to the long gestation period, high risk/low returns and sheer scale of the project, and competing demands have forced the government to encourage the private sector participation; including foreign investment in the infrastructure sector. But as it can be observed that most infrastructure created through the reform oriented fund flows have class-based usage are of less effective value to the those at the bottom of the pyramid. Upgradations to airports, (For instance Mumbai International Airport Expansion) has enable

acquisition of large tracts of slum encroached public land for commercial exploitation<sup>1</sup> this posits the vital question of who has the Right to the City. David Harvey has critiqued the influence of capital to change the face of the cities by investing surplus capital in grandiose infrastructure projects which systematically lead to large scale displacement and marginalization of the poor [3].

### 3. EXCLUSION OF URBAN POOR IN MUMBAI

The scale of the problem of planning is widespread in Indian cities but we can locate it in Mumbai city – The urban transition in this city has failed to improve the conditions of urban poor and the vision for the city includes only a narrow market driven development agenda. The social and cultural disjoint between the populace of Mumbai is evident when we see the high rises and tall buildings on one side and places like the M-ward, which is among one of the places having the lowest Human Development Index (HDI) worldwide [4]. Further, high real estate prices in Mumbai have made it difficult for middle class to buy a house, leave aside urban poor. Such paradoxes in a small city like Mumbai shows that the spatial and economic realities of a city can vary at very small distances.

### 4. STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS OF THE CHALLENGE

The growing popularity of stakeholder analysis reflects an increasing recognition of how characteristics of stakeholders – individuals, groups, organizations influence decision making processes [5]. Any decision making is effective only when all the groups who hold stake in the process are accounted or their interests are negotiated by a multi-lateral decision-making. In the instance of planning for a city like Mumbai – at a very broad level stakeholder can be mapped on the basis of their interests and the legitimacy/power they can render upon the planning process, according to which they can be fit into a two-dimensional representation by a common method.



Fig. 1: A Stakeholder Mapping for Planning Processes for the Mumbai City

<sup>1</sup> News article - [http://www.dnaindia.com/mumbai/report\\_mmrda-accused-of-fraud-in-redevelopment-of-mumbai-airport\\_1588914](http://www.dnaindia.com/mumbai/report_mmrda-accused-of-fraud-in-redevelopment-of-mumbai-airport_1588914)

This method entails prioritizing the decision making and managing stake holders according to interests. From the representation below one can see the how major institutions and groups interplay and the level of power and interest at which they lie.

## 5. WAY FORWARD

There is a need to understand the urban development processes in general and the processes of exclusion in particular in Indian cities. The scope of this rationalization can vary according to the scale of the marginalized enumerated in each city. Mumbai forms and excellent site specific example for study – as a city where 60% of its population stays in slums

### Participatory Planning

Effective planning can never be reproduced through a stoic and distant view of city only as a landmass, and this was recognized as the centralized nature of planning gave way to the introduction of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments which were aimed to actualize an approach towards planning which is more participatory in nature. With the Municipalities formed in the urban centre representation of people's interest through participation was sought.

Participatory planning process empowered through the decentralization of function can be formulated through intensive participation of stakeholders. This is necessary because in a scenario of limited resources and a multiplicity of stakeholders and their demands, conflicts of interest are inevitable **but it can be tackled if an effective strategy of stakeholder consultations and negotiations is evolved.** It is especially important to ensure participation of women in general and those from the disadvantaged sections in particular. These processes of public participation are thought to be more efficient and accountable in the longer run, though capacity building for functionality of these local governments form a major challenge.

### Use of Technology for Data Management in Planning

The Master Plan vis-à-vis the CDPs have a marked difference that the former were based on extensive surveys which led to capture more effectively the urban community for which City planning was envisaged. Current population estimates used by CDPs often rely on outdated secondary data.

One of the biggest stumbling blocks to good meaningful planning is the lack of primary and secondary data. Even if data is available it is often unclassified, reducing the scope for meaningful analysis. It is not disaggregated to the relevant scale for use by local bodies for planning. It is also often outdated. Since singular sources or agencies for reliable data-supply are not mandated, there is a tendency for each user agency to collect data *de novo*.

This is expensive, inefficient and leads to downstream problems of inconsistent databases. Even in operationalizing different development schemes, there are sever discrepancies in identification of beneficiaries and enumeration. Even the mega sources of data like the National Census and NSS, may have flawed data collection techniques, this can be seen clearly in the blatant lacunae in the estimation of the Below Poverty Line population, which in effect secludes a segment of people and make them invisible, and unaccounted for in the eyes of the state. Hence if the Planning process is based on a robust database enabled by technology, many planning initiatives will achieve more. Innovations in this tandem may respond to this major debilitation in planning for the urban poor and create a "representation space" for them which is indispensable in seeking an equitable development.

### Planning– Services and Housing v/s Infrastructure

Planning also includes arranging for the avail of basic services to the people of the nation though conversely planning for the world class city envisages grand infrastructure for the public. This vision needs to modulate and optimize its focus according to the mainstream needs and their required priority. A city that is inclusive and plans for the urban poor will conclude to be more sustainable in the long run. Housing issue is a major challenge which needs attention. The slums within a city or a city within a slum, is a dilemma which many urban centers are facing today. For a city like Mumbai, where about more that 60% of the people inhabit in informal housing this logic holds and it rightly reflects the idea of Shadow cities [6]. The illegal structures form huge housing colonies and squatter settlements all visible in almost all the Class I cities in the country. The illegality of the poor, impairs them a degree further; as their citizenship is already debated, their very existence falls out of the purview of the governance systems in India.

The overriding theme of the Eleventh Year Plan is inclusive growth. And it becomes mandatory due to high levels of informalization in terms of both housing and economic activity. The requirement of Inclusiveness often creates paradoxical situations which involve conflict of interests. In terms of city planning for infrastructure large numbers of people have been displaced whilst implementation of urban transport projects (MUTP-Mumbai). Even transient events like the 2010 Commonwealth Games in New Delhi has led to displacement of the urban poor and affected them adversely in many ways. Re-shaping of urban landscapes elevate the significance of urban land – and result in the process of capital accumulation and in the dispossession of the poor [7].

The McKinsey Report - Bombay First, which inspires to convert Mumbai into a world class city, has one of its objectives of „bringing down the number of people living in the slums from the current 50-60 per cent to 10-20 per cent. Mumbai also needs to increase housing affordability by, for instance, bringing down housing rental costs from their current 140 per cent of per capita income to about 50 per cent". And it

proposes this to be done by actions like Increasing FSI (Floor Space Index) to an average of 3-4 in as many zones as possible, linking it to a redevelopment programme and also proposes is that the Government reform the SRA process such that slum dwellers get free land, but contribute partially towards the cost of construction. Under this scheme, they will be asked to pay either a lump-sum or Rs. 750-1,500 per month towards their constructed homes as a “user charge”. This concept of user charges for living space may not fit the bill of many slum-dwellers due to limited access to enough financial resources. In this scenario a model of differential pricing can be adopted on the basis of paying capacity. The vision itself has been debated to have an elite bias and an over reliance on the public private partnerships. The emphasis on basic infrastructure should supersede to that given to mega-infrastructure projects for the world class city ambition. Here the question of **checks and balances enters the picture**. The processes of urban development planning can be checked through an empowered civil society.

### The Role of Civil Society

The civil society groups can be a part of the planning process by taking up an engaging and monitoring role. Civil society can comprise organizations and institutions such as religious groups, nongovernmental organizations, community and neighbourhood groups, micro-credit groups, women's organizations, self-help groups, social movements or informal business networks. Considering that the informal networks and informal economy in a city like Mumbai is strong and forms a local political consciousness, a degree of legality is achieved by services and citizenship fostered through civil society groups, resident welfare associations and a multitude of these informal bodies. **A balance between formal and informal institutions can be sought through a strong civil society role.** Our team advocates a deeper investigation into the possibility of having stronger social net for mapping interests for the informal sector through civil society groups.

## 6. CONCLUSION

World class cities or Megacities prioritize economic competitiveness by visibly making the city more attractive and self-sufficient. In the mirage of City Branding, the interests of the marginalized get forsaken and full thrust is given to grandiose infrastructure for a buoyant city image in the worldview.

Planning theory in India has involved the state becoming distant and compartmentalized to the interests of the poor and empowerment through participation is still in infancy. But apart from these factors are the important drivers which have led this planning perspective to be adopted. The Market forces, globalization, liberalization and the reform trends have all aggrandized the role of the cities as centers for investment, financial gains and high economic output. In such an economically vibrant environment we have identified that a

cognizance to the stakeholders involved in urban development is of essence. A rich mapping of stakeholders may allow a capture of distinct interests and the power play that may be involved with. The mapping of stakeholders should further create spaces for interaction and negotiation for major roles like infrastructure creation, upgradation, displacement of informal settlements, and equitable rehabilitation among others. Certain key salient points that can be reflected upon are

- Better, inclusive governance is a vital step towards better cities
- Cities should seek to improve services, and strive more to manage demand
- Technology will help deliver transparency and efficiency
- Civil Society Participation can lead to effective urban planning
- The private sector has a role to play in increasing efficiency

Future ahead – The overarching reforms in planning are institutionalizing better governance mechanism, and this can be achieved by streamlining the finer nuances of governance, by being creative in their approach to city governance; for example – fostering support from civil society and the private sector in service delivery. For a more citizen-oriented administration, the government processes need to be more responsive to the needs of the urban poor.

Stabilizing the role of civil society and public participation will make cities better maintained and will result in conception of innovative institutional mechanisms. The urban poor should be given space to work as equal partners in the urban development, through increased participation; advanced use of technology in data management and private sector participation. The optimization that needs to be achieved in context of planning should be based on the principle that cities are not a function of these planning and alternately, the planning should be a function of the demographic and socio-political arrangements of a city

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