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**Urban Slums: An Economic Asset Waiting to
be Discovered**

Avantika Thareja¹

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¹ *Lady Irwin College, University of Delhi, India*

The throes of urban policy premise have been the overwhelming and ever-growing presence of slums. The term ‘slum-free city’ has been an aspiration of the centre and the state besides just being a public obligation. But what does the slum-free city actually mean? When and what engenders this transformation of an illegal slum to a neighbourhood? And most importantly will the transformation vis a vis eradication of slums lead to the envisioned urban development?

Among these slum blocks:

58% have open or no drainage	43% must bring water from outside their communities.
26% do not have access to clean drinking water	34% have no public toilets in their communities.
Two electricity outages occur per day	No demarcation between residential and commercial areas
Buildings aren't set back from the street or their neighbours	The road width (RoW) is between 5 meters and 1 meter—narrower than any of the mainstream urban roads

(When Does a Slum Stop Being a Slum?, 2018)

Piecemeal up-gradation of slums with policies such as the National Slum Development Program (NSDP) in 1996 aimed at nearly 47,000 slums throughout India. The scheme worked on improving physical amenities - such as water supply, stormwater drains, community baths and latrines, wider paved lanes, sewers, streetlights for the entire slum community (Hindman, 2019). Loans to beneficiaries were provided to make improvements to housing as well. Although only 70% (Hindman, 2019) of the allocated funds were disbursed owing to the difficulties in the administrative process. The project lacked proper monitoring and supervision eventually leading to misused funds and time delays.

Likewise, Basic Services to Urban Poor (BSUP), part of a larger scheme called Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission aimed to provide basic services to urban poor in the 63 largest cities in terms of population in India. The BSUP scheme was unsuccessful in accounting the limited capacity of the government for implementing the project. Poor monitoring and lack of transparency of funds here as well added BSUP to the list of failed initiatives to curb the problem of Urban Slums.

In 2015, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna (U) was launched, wherein a public-private partnership was implemented to achieve the goal of “Affordable Housing for All” by 2022. In-Situ Slum Redevelopment (ISSR) — the rehabilitation of slums by building houses through private participation for the eligible slum dwellers on the land under the slums was one of the verticals under this policy among others (Kanwar, 2019).

The policy for incentivisation of the private sector to assist the redevelopment of slum communities along with government intervention was expected to bring the required conveyance in the ambit of slum redevelopment. But, according to a piece featured in *The Wire*, the share of ISSR in the PMAY (U) scheme has been only 6% of total house sanctioned (Kanwar, 2019). The piece also highlighted how the scheme had underperformed in the last 4 years of Implementation. In accordance with this, a piece by the Indian express discovered that approximately 2.19 lakh houses have been sanctioned under PMAY(U) between 2016 and 2019 in Maharashtra, only 22,000 houses have been completed, nearly 80,000 remain incomplete while work on the rest of the units is yet to start. Desperate beneficiaries, waiting for the next instalment of the central subsidy, are now at a standstill; COVID-19 has only made this wait indefinite. The main factor that has led to the withholding of central assistance from the beneficiaries is the failure of some urban local bodies to submit Utilisation Certificates (UC) of the central funds received by them (Rashid, 2020). Poorly promulgated policies, lackadaisical institutions and limited data need to be catered to galvanise the ambitious goals of PMAY.

A study titled ‘Addressing Slum Redevelopment Issues in India’ states that slums are a space for entrepreneurial development and provide affordable accessible housing for urban migrants. Two Studies titled ‘Studying the Real Slums of Bengaluru and Characterising Irregular Settlements Using Machine Learning and Satellite Imagery’ and ‘One Way Ticket—New Migrants, Emerging Settlements, and Stickiness with Bengaluru Slums’ respectively — found that Slums, if provided with formal documentation of Slum property, are untapped ‘wealth’ for both residents and the government. The key findings of these reports point out a myriad of benefits for the urban society ensuring the quality of life across classes for equitable and inclusive India. By converting the assets held by the slum dwellers as a part formal property system, which are legal to hold and fungible with the capital, it has the potential to increase their market value three to five times. This process will enhance the quality of life, value of assets and property’s earning capacity effectively dissolving the slums naturally.

The evidence suggests that there is a need for regularisation and formalisation of slum capital to make the most of this ‘untapped wealth.’ The income generated at the bottom of the economy has higher growth momentum and has the potential to give rise to entrepreneurs at the bottom of the economic pyramid to function efficiently.

The Slums have existed for decades now and expanded to their maximum capacity, physically. Existing planning paradigm of informal settlement does not fit into the current formal planning framework. Such Impotent efforts of the government towards the transformation bring us to a point where the focal point should be on the up-gradation of slums and not uprooting of slums.

Policymakers need to shift their focus towards the creation of a sustainable, PPP model fostering, and resilient slum development infrastructure that, not only legalises slums but, also improves the standard of living and absorbs the inflow of millions of people into these shanty structures.

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