



Urban renewal in India: A critique

Jaswinder Kaur

Post-Doctoral Fellow - UGC, Department of Public Administration, Panjab University, Chandigarh, India

Abstract

With the growth of cities all over the world urban areas are deteriorating. They are struggling with traffic problems, outworn buildings, new modes of living, and boundary problems like expansion. Therefore there is an immediate need to redress the complex of urban problems to arrest further urban decay, to reduce human sufferings and to renew & reshape the urban areas. Urban Renewal is the response to this urban decay. Various renewal policies and programmes have inevitably been bound with issues like housing standards, municipal laws, allocation of resources, economic conditions of the households. Urban renewal has suffered criticism for the insensitive relocation of the poor and powerless, non-involvement of citizens, lack of financial resources, shortage of personnel, multiplicity of agencies and lack of coordination between various executing agencies.

Keywords: urban areas, traffic problems, outworn buildings, housing standards, municipal laws, allocation of resources

Introduction

At the turn of the 21st century the share of the world's population living in urban centers had increased from 39 per cent in 1980 to 48 per cent in 2000. The urban population is 3.77 billion in 2010 ^[1]. With the rapid growth of cities all over the world urban areas are becoming inadequate. Cities and towns have been allowed to function as islands. The consequence of this general neglect is that most urban centers are growing haphazardly in population, area and industrial activity. They are struggling with administrative jurisdiction, traffic problems, outworn structures ^[2], new modes of living and boundary problems like expansion ^[3]. The elevated migration rate and rapid urbanization ^[4] has exerted strong pressure on the available space in urban areas. With continuous growth of population in urban areas standard of buildings, roads, services and utilities have degraded. With such a gamut of challenging problems efficient governance of urban affairs is a crucial task.

It is therefore universally accepted that there is need to renew and reshape the urban areas. There is immediate need to redress the complex of urban problems to arrest further urban decay or to reduce human sufferings ^[5]. Moreover, renewal has gained prominence not only due to deterioration, but also as a result of raising incomes, changing values, rising standards, changing forms of transportation & communication due to accelerated urbanization ^[6].

Urban Renewal

Urban Renewal is an answer to the urban crisis, an increasingly acute universal phenomenon ^[7]. Efforts made to make the existing cities a better place to live in tend to focus on the middle zone, with its mass of poor-quality housing. Administratively, technically and financially the easiest solution is to sweep away the sub-standard accommodation and re-build it ^[8]. Urban renewal is generally associated with making provision of housing for the community, particularly in the older parts of the towns and cities. But later, renewal programmes began to incorporate social infrastructure as well as planned intervention in economic

regeneration and employment generation programmes. It is a development necessity and needs national consensus. It should be a national objective and should form part of national urban policy.

Urban renewal has been defined as the conversion of wasteland into land suitable for use of habitation or cultivation/ the act of renewing/ filling again by supplying what has been used up ^[9]. Thus, urban renewal, a term of relatively recent origin, implies a process by which a large part of a town/city like the inner part slowly renews itself and changes its character to fit in with the new socio-economic needs. By this process the principles like attractiveness, functionalism and economic stability are applied to areas lacking vitality. Urban renewal has been defined as rehabilitation of impoverished urban neighborhoods by large-scale renovation or reconstruction of housing and public works ^[10].

In other words, urban renewal is a process of replanning and comprehensive redevelopment of land structure, physical and social infrastructure as well as conservation and rehabilitation of areas which have been or are being threatened by decline and blight or are in need of preservation because of historical or cultural linkages associated with a city or town ^[11].

Administrative Agencies Dealing With Urban Renewal

Government Agencies dealing with urban renewal at the national, state and local levels are discussed below.

National Level

The apex authorities of Government of India at the National level are Ministry of Urban Development & Ministry of Urban Employment and Poverty Alleviation ^[12]. Both these Ministries formulate policies, sponsor and support programmes, coordinate the activities of various central ministries, state governments and other nodal authorities, and monitor the programmes concerning all the issues of urban development and housing in the country ^[13].

Though the matters pertaining to housing and urban development are items on the State list and hence the State

Government's responsibility, nevertheless the Union Government plays a coordinating and monitoring role and also supports these programmes through centrally sponsored schemes.

State Level

There are various State Urban Development Authorities; these may be different for different states like for Punjab (Punjab Urban Development Authority), Haryana (Haryana Urban Development Authority), and Delhi (Delhi Development Authority). These Urban Development Authorities are responsible for planning residential, commercial and industrial spaces.

The functions performed by urban authorities generally include

- Promotion of well planned and well designed urban development;
- Provision of quality urban infrastructure both social and physical;
- Ensuring quality of life of the highest order in urban areas;
- Promotion of conservation and preservation of valuable natural and manmade heritage;
- Making available cost effective, energy efficient, environmental friendly and affordable housing using state of the art technologies to all strata of society including poorest of the poor;
- Promoting the role of the private sector in achieving the objective of planned development, creation of urban infrastructure, housing.

In addition to this Department of Town and Country Planning also exists at state level where it is engaged in physical planning of urban and rural areas. It prepares schemes and projects of different agencies in order to create better environment and provide planned and developed sites for residential, commercial and industrial purposes.

Some of the activities being performed by the department are:

- To formulate regional plans and master plans;
- To plan residential urban estates and commercial schemes of Urban Development Authority;
- To prepare Integrated Block Development plans of Community Development Blocks in the rural sector;
- To prepare development schemes of improvement trusts;
- To plan municipal lands and properties;
- To prepare regulatory town planning schemes of Municipal Corporations and other urban local bodies; and
- To carry on survey and mapping of regional planning areas and cities.

Local Level

Municipalities are there at the local level (74th Constitutional Amendment Act 1992). This Act provided constitutional status to municipalities and state governments are under constitutional obligation to establish municipalities. These also deal with urban renewal as part of their work of urban development.

The Twelfth schedule to the Constitution of India contains 18 functional items placed within the purview of municipalities. Those concerned with planning and development are listed below:

- Urban planning including town planning;

- Regulation of land use and construction of buildings;
- Slum improvement and upgradation;
- Urban poverty alleviation;
- Provision of urban amenities and facilities;
- Planning for economic and social development.

Urban Renewal Policies and Programmes

The Indian experience of urban renewal is fairly recent though several cities, particularly metropolises, have been attempting to tackle the problem of decline through *ad hoc* initiatives. The diverse and complex nature of Indian society, which Indian cities reflect, does not provide a uniform picture. Problems are different, a context differs, needs change and therefore, the policies and programmes to deal with each city and town would also differ. Renewal policies and programmes have inevitably been bound with the issues of housing standards, rent acts, municipal laws, allocation of resources, economic conditions of the households and so on. The problem of redevelopment of decayed areas is extremely complex and multi-dimensional. In India, the metropolitan cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta, Lucknow, Jaipur, Chennai, Ahmedabad, Nagpur and Hyderabad have undertaken urban renewal programmes to develop their old cities. The urban renewal scheme implemented for Kamtipura in Mumbai has carried out the works like provision of housing, creation of better living environment in old areas, provision of social facilities and public amenities and correction of the distortions in the land use pattern. The problem of urban renewal in metropolitan Calcutta revolves around the phenomenon of *bustees* or clusters of slums where approx. 57 per cent of the population lives. In the case of the city of Delhi several programmes like *Jhuggi-Jhopri* Renewal Scheme, action programme of urban renewal and redevelopment in the master plan, and various environmental improvement programmes are being implemented over the last four decades to resettle the squatter families. Any strategy of urban renewal should first identify the aspects/areas of renewal to be addressed and then plan accordingly.

The old city of Lucknow was once the centre for social, economic, political and administration activities, but now, it hardly retains its traditional grandeur. The Lucknow Development Authority has taken up renewal projects in the form of beautification of places around a few old buildings by developing parks for the recreation of the people in the neighborhood.

In December 2005 the Government of India launched Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) to be simultaneously implemented in 63 cities across the country. The Mission has been differently implemented in different cities, some works have started in some places and nothing has started so far in many like Ludhiana. The critique below offers some explanation for the non performance. Interestingly some cities like Hyderabad have been on schedule and completed their projects.

Critique

- **Multiplicity of agencies:** Urban Development Authorities of all states depend upon various public agencies to obtain necessary technical know-how and for the execution of its own programmes. This requires effective inter-agency coordination. However, executing agencies have their own priority of works and the

absence of an integration of implementation plans across related agencies causes delay in completion of the renewal programme. There is need to address the problem of the blinkered vision they individually suffer from, working as a stand-alone agency rather than responsible partners in the task of renewal. A clear cut role within the strategic and operational plans for urban renewal would work towards functional efficiency and achievement of long term goals.

- **Lack of financial resources:** Urban renewal, as a remedial measure for urban decay, is an expensive public responsibility. The various State Urban Development Authorities alone cannot bear the brunt of heavy fiscal investment. Nor can the governments alone adequately supplement finances. It should be recognized as a national responsibility to ensure that metropolitan cities maintain their vigour in rendering services to their region, their hinterlands and the country, as a whole. The remedy involves heavy investment in terms of human, physical, financial and technical resources. This should come from a number of sources i.e. national, state and local governments, both banking and non-banking financial institutions, civil society organizations.
- **Shortage of Personnel:** Personnel are an important factor for effective Organizations. Various State Urban Development Authorities, Municipalities and other agencies included in renewal programmes lack adequate staff required to take up the tasks assigned to them and consequently there are delays in execution. Concerned agencies should take steps to fill their vacant posts for better organizational effectiveness.
- **Inadequate people's participation:** The objective of urban renewal cannot be achieved by governmental efforts alone - community involvement is ultimately the key to the success of any public programme. Each component of urban renewal, for instance redevelopment, rehabilitation or conservation requires that community participation from the neighborhood concerned should be obtained to ensure that none loses employment or accommodation without adequate guarantee for compensation. Civil society, Non Government Organizations' and local people should be involved for achieving the goals of development and redevelopment with social justice. Only through 'partnerships' can renewal plans be effectively implemented.

Insensitivity towards urban poor: Urban renewal has often been criticized for the insensitive relocation of the poor and powerless without adequate thought to alternative opportunities for these communities. If any such scheme or services are there it is mostly found that urban poor rarely benefit from them. Care must be taken to see that the urban and semi-urban poor are provided housing near their place of occupation. Further, while relocating existing slums, it is important to focus on building neighborhoods with essential health, education and other facilities instead of simply building houses. An established neighborhood, along with appropriate financial and administrative mechanisms for allotment of housing is likely to decrease the probability of persons reselling a subsidized allotment and reestablishing the slum. However, this is more easily said than done involving as it does integration of the working of various departments.

References

1. Pranati Datta. Urbanisation on India”, paper presented at Regional and Sub-Regional Population Dynamic, Population Process in Urban Areas, European Population Conference, 2006, 21-24.
2. Wilfred Burns. New Towns for Old: The Technique of Urban Renewal, Leonard Hill limited, London, 1963, 14-27.
3. Marshall Miller J. (ed) New Life of Cities Around The World, Books International, New York, 1959, 6.
4. Urbanization is a demographic process which refers to redistribution of population between rural and urban areas and also to the changing morphological structure of urban agglomerations and its development.
5. www.search.eb.com of Encyclopedia Britannica Online, 12 Jan 2009.
6. Miller, *op.cit*, pp. 7.
7. Ansari AS. Urban Renewal and Development, Rawat Publications, Jaipur and New Delhi, 2000, 11.
8. Elkins TH. The Urban Explosion, The MacMillan Press Ltd., London, 1973, 54.
9. www.wordwebonline.com of word web, 10 Jan 2009.
10. www.thefreedictionary.com of Free dictionary, 10 Jan 2009.
11. Ansari, *op.cit*, pp. 11.
12. www.urban India.nic.in of Ministry of Urban Development, 01 Feb 2009.
13. In 2000, the Union Ministry of Urban Development and Poverty Alleviation was divided into two departments- (i) Department of Urban Development and (ii) Department of Urban Employment and Poverty Alleviation. But in 2004, the Ministry was bifurcated into two Ministries namely; (i) Ministry of Urban Development and (ii) Ministry of Urban Employment & Poverty Alleviation.