

## Rehabilitation of slum dwellers: Taking the right approach

- [Abu Hayat Mahmud Tanbir Uddin Arman](#)
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A woman with her son pictured recently in an alley of a slum near Mohammadpur Beribadh area  
PHOTO:RAJIB DHAR

None of the world's megacities may come close to Dhaka in terms of population boom. Amid this hyper-density is the sordid underbelly of the city's rapid growth: its immense slums.

Massive influx of people, compounded by inflation and lack of affordable housing, has resulted in more and more people squatting in over 3,300 squalid slums that pockmark the entire metropolis.

Fire, arson attack, extortion and sexual harassment all have become constant companions of the slums' inhabitants. Added to their woes is eviction, with the city undergoing a massive revamp under the government's one mega development project after another.

The modernisation, however, comes at a huge price. More and more slum dwellers are rendered homeless as their shacks are being either bulldozed in broad daylight or burnt to ashes by thugs in the dead of night to clear up the settlements, leaving them in the lurch. Once displaced, they face a loss of social capital as they find themselves far away from their workplaces, which results in higher transportation costs or even the loss of their livelihoods.

Chairman of the Centre for Urban Studies Prof Nazrul Islam said: "Eviction without proper resettlement will lead to an increase in the number of crimes as there is a possibility that the dispossessed people might get involved in subversive activities if they find nothing to do to make ends meet."

### **Constitutional guarantees**

Article 15 (a) of the Constitution states: "It shall be a fundamental responsibility of the state to...provide basic necessities of life, including food, clothing, shelter, education and medical care."

Articles 31 and 32, which guarantee fundamental rights to protection and life in accordance with law, too impose an obligation upon the state not to take measures detrimental to life, body and property of any person.

### **Right to shelter: A broken promise**

Notwithstanding the existing constitutional guarantees against forced evictions and earlier High Court orders directing the government to provide for proper notice and rehabilitation measures before displacement, slums are demolished and their residents evicted virtually every year. In the last five years, the slum people saw bulldozers swoop on them in as many as seven eviction drives, three of which are as follows.

On April 4, 2012, the Dhaka district administration removed around 2,000 illegal structures and reclaimed 170 acres of a public land in Mohakhali's Korail slum, forcing hundreds of its inhabitants to live in the open without food, water and toilets.

The move to dislodge the squatters, according to the administration, came after a High Court order directing it to demolish the illegal structures in the surrounding opulence of Gulshan and neighbouring Baridhara, which are demarcated as beggar-free zones.

On January 21 last year, the Ministry of Housing and Public Works with the assistance of police conducted a drive in Kallyanpur slum, dwellers of which

claimed that they were not given sufficient time to relocate their belongings before the drive that left several hundred people homeless and further impoverished as a consequence. The eviction, however, halted following a High Court order after a petition filed by the ASK.

REHABILITATION CHALLENGES	WAYS FORWARD
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Non-compliance with High Court orders for resettlement</li><li>● Continued eviction in spite of resettlement polices</li><li>● Assault on slum people during eviction</li><li>● Eviction without proper notice to relocate properties</li><li>● Rehabilitation measures mired in graft</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Prevent eviction without prior rehabilitation</li><li>● Conform to court orders, housing polices</li><li>● Investigate incidents of assault</li><li>● Ensure transparency in resettlement</li><li>● Build awareness among slum dwellers about their rights</li></ul>

On December 7 the same year, nearly 10,000 people of Agargaon slum lost their homes to another eviction drive carried out by the Public Works Department, the authorities of which, however, claimed that only 1,000-1,200 people were evicted. The drive came only a day after speakers at a national dialogue, attended by as many as 12 lawmakers, agreed that homeless people and slum residents should not be evicted unless their rehabilitation was ensured.

Hundreds more squatters are now scared of bulldozers, with the government mulling to set up a hi-tech park at Koral slum and a hospital for persons with disabilities at Saat Tola slum in Mohakhali.

A Saat Tola slum dweller, Selina Begum, told the Dhaka Tribune that Dhaka North City Corporation Mayor Annisul Huq had already informed them of the government's plan.

Khondkar Rebaka Sun-Yat, executive director of the Coalition for the Urban Poor, said: "Governments come and go. None have ever taken any development initiative for the slum dwellers. But rather, their drives have always been on to assault them, either directly or indirectly, which is a flagrant violation of human rights.

"The incidents of assault have not been probed either."

### **Rehabilitation: Early years' debacle**

In 2004, the BNP-led government initiated the "Bhashantek Rehabilitation Project" in Mirpur for the construction of 111 six-storey buildings for slum people losing their shelters in eviction drives.

The project, initially awarded to the private realtor North South Property Development Ltd (NSPDL), was due to deliver some 13,000 flats in five years ending in 2009, reports a national English daily.

In October 2010, the developer's contract was revoked and the project was later handed to the National Housing Authority over allegations of graft and failure to deliver the flats on time.

On investigation, the land ministry detected that the NSPDL pocketed Tk300m in additional profits by selling 1,056 flats in 10 buildings to well-off families at higher prices, depriving the poor households, according to sources at the ministry. With only 18 buildings built and tenders floated for 12 more, the ministry decided in December 2015 to abandon the plan for the construction of remaining buildings and instead use the land for building quarters for government employees.

The project was not just a major failure on the government's part, but it made the poor people suffer as they exhausted their hard-earned money in investing for the flats for a better living. Many of them were even assaulted, according to them, by goons allegedly hired by the developer to easily clear up the settlement.

### **Mumbai rehabilitation model: A lesson to be learned**

AKM Abul Kalam, a professor of urban and regional planning at Jahangirnagar University and the president of Bangladesh Institute of Planners, said: "There are floating people who come to the city and move elsewhere after a certain period. So, not everyone of them needs to be provided with housing facilities and land tenure rights as they are seasonal migrants."

The urban expert, however, suggested taking a leaf out of India's Mumbai slum rehabilitation scheme – Mumbai Model, as it has been dubbed – for an effectual handling of the slums.

The process entails slum members first organising themselves into co-ops. They then vote to award a realtor the mandate to re-house them in high-rise buildings — all provided pro bono — in a portion of the site they currently occupy. The rehabilitation also includes reparation for temporary relocation of about three years, during the construction work.

Once the project is completed each family receives legal title and moves into its stipulated 269-square-foot apartment, including a kitchenette and a bathroom with tap water, according to an article published in Stanford Social Innovation Review. In return for providing this pro-bono rehabilitation, the Slum Rehabilitation Authority awards the developer an incentive subsidy to build and sell commercially an equivalent area on the remaining portion of the site. Both components are demarcated and have independent access roads.

Unique and hard to underestimate, the approach to rehabilitating slums not just offsets the costs of pro bono slum rehabilitations, but generates a tidy investment return for the developer and investors.

Given that the scheme's democratic nature is the bedrock of its success, urban planners in Dhaka underscore emulating the model for efficiently dealing with dynamics of the city's rapid population growth.

<http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/dhaka/2017/03/03/rehabilitation-slum-dwellers-taking-right-approach/>