

### **Book Review**

Darshini Mahadevia, *Shelter Security in Urban India Pathways, Barriers and Outcomes*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 2015, pp. 346, Price ₹ 1400/-.

This book is a collection of articles on problems of shelter in urban India. Different authors have covered different aspects.

Chapter 1 by Darshini Mahadevia reviews the situation of slums in Indian cities. It brings out the effectiveness of policies and programmes in the post-1990s, particularly after UN-HABITAT conference and reports. The very beginning India failed to frame effective security of tenure to the residents of informal settlements. Some state governments have framed slum development policies which could not meet slum dwellers' demand. The public housing programme could not deliver and so the urban poor depend on their own devices to find a shelter. The state and city governments should not demolish slums and if they need to displace them for infrastructure projects, they would do well with a participatory rehabilitation process and not act arbitrarily.

Corruption in sanctioning housing plans encourages construction of buildings without the approval of plans. Elite citizens are angry at urban slums, but keep mum on corruption. They forget why urban poor live in pathetic conditions. Affordable housing policy of the Government of India is beyond the reach of the low income households and private sector driven housing is also beyond the reach of a household with average income.

The Chapter 2 by Darshini Mahadevia, Trishna Gogoi and Suchita Vyas discusses informal housing in Rajkot. Informal settlements are on public lands owned by the central, state or local governments. Settlements on private land are also illegal since land comes under reserved or no development plan in the master plan. Most of the needy urban poor construct houses by using their hard earned money and live there. There is no protection to them under the laws. An urban slum settlement policy is needed so that urban poor get property rights.

Chapter 3 by Darshini Mahadevia and Pooja Shah discuss informal housing in Surat. The first part deals with eight slums and the second includes case studies, interviews, etc. It estimated that 14.4 per cent people live in slums and about 80 per cent of them are migrants. Informal settlements have informal developers who accept incremental investment to develop housing. There are many legal issues in such dealings like loans, etc., but they are not discussed.

In Chapter 4 Rajendra Joshi, Pooja Shah and Keren Nazareth claim that the civil society has been proactive in poverty alleviation and empowering the urban poor. This claim is not supported by evidence. Most such organizations advocate the rights of urban poor. But only a few of them are directly involved in poverty alleviation programmes. The state is a major stakeholder and invests in public

infrastructure in slum settlements. The authors have studied the post-2002 riot affected areas and found that “Sath” helped dwellers in their rehabilitation.

Chapter 5 by Pooja Shah and Bijal Bhatt covers mobilisation of women for change. It primarily focuses on shelter security through Mahila Housing Seva Trust (MHT). The contribution of the Seva bank in providing loans to slum dwellers is highlighted. Slum projects are undertaken with people’s participation despite local musclemen threatening to stop works. Problems faced by slum dwellers and their solution to find a place here.

Chapter 6 by Darshini Mahadeva, Pooja Shah and Pavan Kumar Ankinapalli is based on a field survey. Problems of information on ownership of land, etc., were faced. Slums dwellers do not have ownership documents. Despite their living for longer periods, the government does not provide basic amenities.

Chapter 7 by Darshini Mahadeva, Pooja Shah, Rutool Sharma and Pavan Kumar Ankinapalli discuss the relationship between the level of security and involvement of external agencies on the one hand and the quality of life of the residents in slums with intervention of external agency. They appreciate the Slum Networking Project (SNP) which helped to get basic services at houses. However, those who signed documents were benefited and the others who refused to sign in fear of eviction were not. Girls in slums face many problems like sexual harassment and so they are afraid to go school.

In Chapter 8 Renu Desai has studied informal settlements in Nanded (Maharashtra). These settlements are located on government lands. Still, the government provides few basic facilities to them. In some cases even though the government evicted slum dwellers, they settled down in other places.

In the next and last chapter Darshini Mahadevia and Abhijit Datey observe that in Bhopal slums are protected under the Patta Act, 1984. MP government has good schemes of slum development as MP Housing and Infrastructure Development Board, MP Urban Services for Poor, Slum Environment Sanitation Initiatives, and Basic Services for Urban Poor. The implementation of these four programmes is discussed. The authors regret that although these programmes spent huge amount of money on the urban poor, they ignored their real requirements. Further, the attitude of officials towards the poor was insensitive. Haphazard implementation of programmes has resulted in chaos, created distrust in governance, worsened basic services, snatched the right to land and converted owners into borrowers.

Broadly speaking, these are the issues discussed in this book. Although there are many other works on the subject, it has raised new issues. The selected case studies in it are of particular interest. Therefore, it will be handy for people working on slum projects and livelihood of slum dwellers.