

INDIA: URBAN POVERTY REPORT 2009

FACTSHEET

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, Government of India, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have launched India's first-of-its-kind report on the nature and dynamics of urban poverty in the country. The report, **India-Urban Poverty Report 2009**, brings together inputs from eminent researchers, academics and civil society representatives.

Key messages from the report

- **The urban population of India is increasing but not as fast as other Asian countries**
India has shared the growth pattern with some of the fastest growing regions in Asia. The country has witnessed around 8 percent growth in GDP in the last couple of years. India's urban population is increasing at a faster rate than its total population. Urbanisation has been recognised as an important component of economic growth. At 28 percent, the pace of urbanisation, however, has been slow and lower than the average for Asia. The absolute number of people in urban cities and towns, however, has gone up substantially. The researchers expect rate of urbanisation to also increase in the coming years. With over 575 million people, India will have 41 percent of its population living in cities and towns by 2030 from the present level of 286 million.
- **But this success has been accompanied by poverty in urban areas**
Urban poverty in India remains high, at over 25 percent. Over 80 million poor people live in the cities and towns of India. (Source: National Sample Survey Organisation's survey report). This is roughly equal to the population of Egypt.
- **This has resulted in the 'Urbanisation of Poverty'**
A large number of states report poverty figures in urban areas much above that in rural areas. At the national level, rural poverty is higher than poverty in urban areas but the gap between the two has decreased over the last couple of decades. The incidence of decline of urban poverty has not accelerated with GDP growth. As the urban population in the country is growing, so is urban poverty.
- **The nature of Urban Poverty poses different problems**
Urban poverty poses the problems of housing and shelter, water, sanitation, health, education, social security and livelihoods along with special needs of vulnerable groups like women, children and aged people.

- **An increase in the slum population is one example**

As per 2001 census report the slum population of India in cities and towns with a population of 50,000 and above was 42.6 million, which is 22.6 per cent of the urban population of the states/ Union Territories reporting slums. This could also roughly be the size of Spain or Columbia.

11.2 million of the total slum population of the country is in Maharashtra followed by Andhra Pradesh (5.2 million), and Uttar Pradesh (4.4 million). Although the slum population has increased, the number of slums is lower (National Sample Survey Organisation's 58th Round), which makes them more dense. There is higher concentration of slum population in the large urban centres (Census, 2001).

- **Poor in slums do not have access to basic services like sanitation or water**

Poor people live in slums which are overcrowded, often polluted and lack basic civic amenities like clean drinking water, sanitation and health facilities. Most of them are involved in informal sector activities where there is constant threat of eviction, removal, confiscation of goods and almost non-existent social security cover. A substantial portion of the benefits provided by public agencies are cornered by middle and upper income households. 54.71 percent of urban slums have no toilet facility. Most free community toilets built by state government or local bodies are rendered unusable because of the lack of maintenance.

- **The homeless live an even more precarious life**

As per the 2001 census, the total urban homeless population is 7, 78,599 people. Delhi had 3.1 percent of the national level, and Bihar and Tamil Nadu had 1.6 percent and 7.3 percent respectively. Many people interviewed chose the streets because paying rent would mean no savings and therefore no money sent back home and hence the street was the only option for them. Their condition is chiefly linked to their lack of adequate shelter. In Delhi, for over a 100,000 homeless people, the government runs 14 night shelters with a maximum capacity of 2,937 people, which is only 3 percent of the homeless people in the city. Outside in the walled city of Delhi, private contractors called thijawalahs rent out quilts (winter) and plastic sheets (monsoon) for five rupees a night. Iron cots are rented for 15 rupees a night. 71 percent said that they had no friends. In a study of homeless populations, homeless men, women and children in four cities reported that they were beaten by the police at night and driven away from their make-shift homes/shelters.

Stories of the homeless

After 17 years of sleeping on the streets of Delhi, Saroja Devi slept in the first shelter for homeless women in Delhi and said that what she valued most in the months she stayed at the shelter was that for the first time she had the assurance of an uninterrupted night's sleep.

'I live on a pavement in the old Delhi area. And know how people survive on pavements. If one meal is available, then another time one has to sleep without food. No one sleeps on an empty stomach willingly and happily. But what can one do? When we go to find some work, we are asked a series of questions like: "From where have you come? What do you do? Do you thieve? Who can stand guarantee for you?" How can you get work like this? Now tell me, what will one do to fill one's stomach?' - Seventeen-year-old Hashim sleeps among the multitudes of homeless people in the open ground near Jama Masjid, in the medieval walled city of Delhi.

Sixty-five year old Budhan Bai spends eight months a year begging and sleeping in the courtyard of Kalkaji Mandir in Delhi to support her ailing husband in their village in Uttar Pradesh.

- **Does migration have a relation to urban poverty**

The report finds that the incidence of migration in India has shown an increase in 2001 as compared to consistent decline during 1961-1991. The economic motive remains the main reason for migration among male interstate migrants. Economically backward states keep losing people to developed states. Poverty incidence was found less among migrants as compared to non-migrants but it was higher among rural to urban migrants. Middle and higher income groups show higher propensity to move. The most successful group of migrants is urban to urban migrants in terms of type of occupation they have and their income levels due to better education and skills they possessed. Influx of migration towards metropolitan cities indicates that economic reforms have not been able to create much employment opportunities in small and medium towns and in rural areas.

- **Proposed solutions to urban poverty**

1. There should be greater equity in the provision of basic services as interstate and intercity disparity has acquired alarming proportions.
2. Small and medium towns, particularly in backward states, should get special assistance from the central / state government as their economic bases are not strong enough to generate adequate resources.
3. Constitutional amendments for decentralization should be backed up by actual devolution of powers and responsibilities and their use by the municipal bodies
4. As much of the subsidized amenities have gone to high and middle income colonies, the restructure of these programmes and schemes is needed to ensure that subsidies are made explicit through strict stipulations, targeted through vulnerable sections of population.
5. There is good potential for organising slum communities as the average size of size of slum is small.
6. To improve sanitation standards, it is suggested to construct community toilets where individual toilets are not possible, to extend sewerage networks to slum areas and connect toilet outlets with that, and community management of toilets in common places.
7. Solar, bio-gas and non-conventional energy needs to be promoted for street lights as well as in household energy use wherever possible and feasible. Complete coverage of slum households through electric connections should be ensured.