

UNCOVERING MYTHS OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN MUMBAI

Pre-conference workshop organised by Tata Institute of Social Sciences

Tata Institute of Social Sciences organised a pre-conference workshop, on “Uncovering Myths of Urban Development in Mumbai” as a prelude to the Urban Age India Conference organised by the London School of Economics and the Alfred Herrhausen Society of Deutsche Bank in Mumbai on November 1, 2007. The workshop facilitated open interaction among academics from Indian and international universities on significant hypotheses emerging from recent urban-renewal discourses on Mumbai.



An international panel comprised of academics from the London School of Economics, Harvard Law School, Temple University in Philadelphia, Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City, along with practitioners from Rockefeller Foundation and the State of Sao Paulo joined a majority of faculties drawn from various disciplines at Tata Institute of Social Sciences and academics from Indian Institute of Technology Delhi (IIT), IIT Mumbai, Mumbai University, Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research (IGIDR), International Institute of Population Sciences (IIPS) and Pune University.

The workshop was open and minimally structured in order to initiate deliberations. Four hypotheses were posed in the form of questions:

- Slum-free Mumbai for Urban Renewal?

- Modern Transportation Systems: Aiming for Sustainability?
- Emerging Service Sectors: Is Labour Market prepared for the transition?
- Access to Social Infrastructure: Implications for Quality of Life?

Slum Free Mumbai for Urban Renewal?

Much of the debate on a plethora of Mumbai problems is invariably linked to migration, its implications for housing and land use patterns. Prof. Sujatha Patel, Head of Department of Sociology at Pune University, while initiating the discussion, said that Mumbai is the city of migration and there has been politics of migration associated with it ever since its existence in 18th century. It is all related to the way the city was officially defined and in 1975 there was a growing movement to renounce any further migrants. There is today enough evidence to say that within greater Bombay (municipal administrated), there is natural increase in population and those who are settling down are doing out so outside Mumbai in the Mumbai Urban Agglomeration and the planned MMR region.

The visible fallout of migration for the city of Mumbai has been slums. For a very long time there was a debate whether slums are a problem or slums are indigenous coping solutions. Dr. Amita Bhide, Associate Professor at TISS stated that slums in the current context are a ‘resource’ for builders, international developers, politicians, and even NGOs. So it is not about ‘slum-free’ Mumbai, but ‘slum perpetuation’ in Mumbai for Urban Renewal. The current rehabilitation schemes championed by Government in partnership with builders show the confidence city policymakers and politicians have not only in displacing people, but also rehabilitating them.

Studies have shown that much of the claims of rehabilitation by the government have merely been the relocation of people from prime city areas to far-flung areas. The trade offs for the displaced families have been devastating in terms of loss of livelihoods and constricted access to education and health. This gives people no choice but to squat again within the city limits, not because they prefer living closer to their workplaces but so as to avoid expenditures on travel. With high participation from the private sector, rehabilitation is a viable proposition involving little investment from the Government. Hence it is likely to be continued in the name of making Mumbai 'slum-free'.

The free housing policy of the Maharashtra Government in 1990s, according to Prof. R. N Sharma of Tata Institute, actually marked the death-knell for the vulnerable poor to secure their livelihoods and tenure. The nexus of politicians and city builders using the ploy of cross-subsidization to tackle 'housing poverty' actually displaced them to distant places while granting builders extraordinary profit on the sale of extra FSI in the open market. Such vulnerability of the poor was effectively used by 'builder mafia' to replace market forces and further inequalities in housing. Property rights are not well defined, which is highly relevant to urban renewal through housing redevelopment. So 'who to rehabilitate' is a contentious issue that has been politicized greatly, as confirmed by many other experts.

Prof. Lindsay Bremner, Temple University was intrigued to know about the informal land markets operating in slums and how people acquire and sell land in slums. In response to the query, Prof. Sharma commented that the notion of slums being homogenous entities where all people are poor should be done away with. There are many interest groups existing and contesting the space within the slums. More so because the slum land has become a part of the urban renewal process and has come in the open market through government SRA schemes. The discussion centred around the conspiracy to create more vulnerability among the poor who cash in on the opportunities to create capital by the builders. Slums have always been a part of the city but now they stand in the urban renewal market – which is the major paradigm shift that has taken place in recent years.

Modern Transportation Systems: Aiming for Sustainability?

Prof. S. Sriraman from Bombay University chaired the session, quoting Singapore Prime Minister during his Mumbai visit, that what is important is not to have higher capacity, modern world class systems of transport but to go to the basics of mobility, something which is not being attempted in any reasonable way in any of our cities, let alone in Mumbai. The pricing of services in systems like suburban trains is on a binge. Since there is no focus on rationalizing pricing systems in any of our modes, this has resulted in crisis of sustainability and viability of these systems.



In a report submitted to the Railway Board in 1993, Prof. Sriraman had suggested a marginal increase in the price of season tickets in suburban railways that could take away 10-12% people off the system. The situation is such that in non-peak hours or even holidays, Mumbai trains are packed as everyone has season tickets and wants to take a ride and move around. It is impossible to charge a fare for public transport in India, which cost more than that of running a motorcycle which is Re 1 / km. BEST (Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport) company that runs bus services in the city, is on the verge of collapsing. On almost 100 of its 400 routes, there are no passengers throughout the day and they are not able to shut the services. This is not sustainable for any clean public transportation system. As status quo remains, we may be on the road of no return.

Transportation planning has a lot to do with city size which has not been a part of any transportation debates. Prof. Geetam Tiwari from IIT Delhi said that the relationship between place of work and residence is very important in understanding city size. If one

is walking to work which is the case with Mumbai's 55% people, then Mumbai is essentially a very small city. It doesn't matter if 16 – 20 million people live here. Secondly, average commuting time in Mumbai is 28 minutes, which is less than Mexico city, Johannesburg or other urban age cities. Thus the major concern for this city is that planners are ignoring the walking trips, even when planning for public transport. This is because every public transport trip is first a pedestrian trip. It is obvious that one is ignoring the majority of pedestrian users while planning mainly for the remaining 40% people who travel in trains and buses combined, also termed as captive users, who have no choice but to travel in these modes. Adding to this Mr. Sudhir Badami, Member of the Road Monitoring Committee for Potholes, said that the mindset of authorities is that they don't believe that footpaths are important. It may be a long time before the city can make walking comfortable.

For whatever reasons, even today Mumbai can be termed as an environmentally friendly, transport paradise where the majority of people walk or move in public transport and the dependence on private modes is very small. In Mumbai since people stay close to their work, they have zero carbon emissions and probably can demand carbon credits for our slums. Street crimes in Indian cities is very low compared to cities like Los Angeles. From a sociological point of view, such phenomenon occurs when one allows inclusive cities to come up not by planning, but by defying formal planning process as in the case of Mumbai or other Indian cities.

Prof. Dinesh Mohan from IIT Delhi said that it appears that migration in itself is not the problem when an IT professional migrates from Silicon Valley to Mumbai. So 'who migrates' is the issue, with more likely the solutions producing the problems for this city. These solutions are high speed public transport to bring people into South Mumbai and employ them in extensive construction activity throughout the city. So it is not that Mumbai Suburban trains that have caused the problems for the city? The concept of CBDs (Central Business District) which exists only in Mumbai, has a lot to contribute to the transport situation in the present context. CBDs require the transportation system to readily bring people into the city centre. If there are no CBDs, the whole concept of transport changes. Mumbai certainly doesn't need

high capacity, fast transportation system but rather needs to create infrastructure for people walking, bi-cycling and medium capacity surface systems which are also low cost.

Emerging Service Sectors: Is Labour Market prepared for the transition?

Prof. Sharit Bhowmik from TISS said that the composition of its labour force changed dramatically in last few decades in Mumbai. In 1961 as per census, 65% of the population worked in the formal sector. By 1991, the trend had reversed – 35% working in the formal sector and 65% in the informal sector. By 2001, more than 70% people worked in the informal sector in the city. This meant insecure employment for a majority of the people with low wages and undefined working hours. This informal labour is unregulated by any labour laws. Globalisation seems to be pushing the trend of increasing informal employment, to keep the labor costs cheap. The informal sector is well reflected in the housing patterns in the city. As per housing survey conducted by State department, Bureau of Economics and Statistics in 2000, 73% of urban households lived in a one room house, 18% in 2 rooms and the remaining 9% in 3 or more room houses. Five years earlier, only 69% population lived in 1 room houses. Thus the quality of the housing stock in the city is directly related to the employment and wages of the people inhabiting the city. The profile of people working in the informal economy matches up with low-cost slum housing they prefer. And conversely, these people are able to provide cheap labour to the thriving market, only because of their cheap housing, mostly sufficing with a walking trip to work. So it will not be a misnomer to say that slums are actually proliferating, to counter the economies of urban market and labour.

Mumbai is also a city where anyone can find a job. The organised employment has moved from the main part of Greater Mumbai to outside Mumbai and areas esp. the Thane – Belapur belt. This is evident from the train trips that allegedly increased from city suburbs to distant suburbs upwards rather from city suburbs to the downtown area. With the breakdown of the mills, the slums have also shifted upwards to the suburbs and outskirts of Mumbai.

Prof. Amita Bhide from TISS said that there is a decentralised economy operating within slums. The garment industry for which Mumbai is known operates out of slums and so is the case with leather and food processing industry thriving in the slums of Dharavi. All the slums operating in Mumbai are actually production houses that are highly decentralised, home-based production centres. There is also another economy that serves the slum economy and thus the linkages to formal industry are reducing and therefore the greater incidences of urban poverty.



Access to Social Infrastructure: Implications for Quality of Life?

Governance has taken the center-stage of the urban development discourse. Prof. Abay Pethe, Urban Economist at Mumbai University said that Mumbai at present is characterised by a mad craziness. Mumbai region's economy is 40% of the State economy and has 1/6th of political representation of the State. But the proposal of a directly elected Mayor gathering steam in recent times, will not be easily passed because once Mumbai has a powerful mayor, the State's Chief Minister would become redundant. The prosperity of the city of Mumbai is being milked by the State Government through setting up of special task forces or PM professing for JNNURM but there is hardly any representation of the local bodies in such core committees. Secondly the Municipal Commissioner heading the civic body of the city is usually not a part of these core committees and would never take an independent stand or oppose the State government. The reason being that he is in fact the Chief Minister's nominee and has aspirations of becoming the Chief Secretary.

For public health, there is a reasonable consensus among economists and experts that it is not the resources that is the problem but its effective utilisation.

For services like water, there is a need for rationalization of user charges but it is not seen in the city budgets because Mumbai's water budget is kept separately due to a caveat in the contract with the World Bank. So the water budget will show a sufficient surplus of say 500 cores, but the rates and the cross subsidization actually works against the poor in the city. Education provided by the public bodies is a lost cause. The suggestion to convert all municipal run schools to English medium in policy circles is a baseless idea. Instead these public assets could be used as training institutions for students. Much of the current initiatives to improve public education are ensuring that their own kids do not attend these schools.

In Summary

One of the major dilemmas facing the city is that how Mumbai is dealing with its hinterlands of Thane and Raigad. The adjacent districts of Thane and Raigad, almost 50 km from a thriving city like Mumbai, are among the poorest and most impoverished districts of the country as they lose much of their resources to Mumbai. So as Mumbai becomes richer and better, Thane and Raigad become poorer with levels of infant mortality and deprivation comparable to the northern Indian states of UP and Bihar.

Studies by TISS show that the majority of the migrants that settle in the city are from rural Maharashtra, as they are chasing natural resources and a livelihood taken away from them. Most of the migrants (49 percent) are engaged in informal production related occupations by filling in cheap, labour-oriented and unskilled jobs.

Mumbai attracts such people but does not want them to live close by – this is the loudest message being given by Indian policymakers. It seems that Mumbai is strictly following the Beijing and Shanghai model of increasing the number of people who should remain 'invisible'. Much of city's policy and planning is clandestinely increasing people who are indispensable to the city's economy, yet are disowned when it comes to socio-economic services.

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