

INTRODUCTION

ONE BILLION poor people the world over live without adequate and basic services in slums and squatter settlements'. About 30 to 40 per cent of the people in large cities are slum dwellers in slum like conditions. The population in urban settlements is growing at rates between two to three per cent per annum. The population of slum and informal settlements in urban areas is estimated to be growing at six to eight per cent per annum. Slums in many large cities are increasing in size and in share of urban population. According to an estimate by Habitat 2003, by the year 2020 the current 30 per cent level of poverty in the world could reach 45 to 50 per cent of the total population living in cities, i.e., 381 to 455 million households. The slum population could even go up to two billion by 2030¹. Further, estimates suggest that in most cities of the developing world, nearly half of the urban population lives in informal slum or squatter settlements that are not legally recognised by the city authorities. The informal parts of the city do not get the benefits of urban life, including secure tenure.²

It is for the first time in the history of Census in India that the urban demography is presented on the basis of the actual count. According to the Census of India 2001, around 42.6 million population in India live in slums. This constitutes 15 per cent of the total urban population.³

The above statistics of slums illustrate the proliferation of slums worldwide and as well as in India. Besides, it also demonstrates the need of the problem signifying the need for a better understanding of the problem and consequently to reduce their growth in future. For understanding the problem, it is therefore imperative to understand its definition. This is because in general practice, the definition of slum is taken into consideration by the development agencies for undertaking any developmental activity. For example in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, a number of poor settlements notified under the *AP Slum Area Improvement and Clearance Act, 1956* were notified and subsequently considered for developmental activities. Whereas, remaining poor settlements which do not fall within the definition were not notified. Later, these settlements grew into the most hazardous areas posing a threat to the surrounding areas.

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However, a number of these settlements were later identified and considered for notification by the Andhra Pradesh Urban Services for the Poor (APUSP)* during the years 2000-07.⁵

POVERTY

According to Online Etymology Dictionary the word *Slum* was originally used as *back slum*, street of poor people, meaning a back room. The origin of this word is believed to be from the Irish phrase '*S lóm é*' (pron. s'lum ac) meaning *exposed vulnerable place*.⁶ Slums are usually characterized by urban decay and high rates of poverty. Poverty is the shortage of common basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter and safe drinking water, which determine quality of life. Besides, this shortage may also include lack of access to basic services such as sanitation, street lights, roads, electricity etc., and to opportunities such as education and employment. According to Mollie Orshansky who developed the poverty measurements used by the U.S. government, *to be poor is to be deprived of those goods and services and pleasures which others around us take for granted*.⁷

Internationally, an income of less than one dollar per day per head of purchasing power parity (PPP)** is defined as extreme poverty. The World Bank defines *extreme poverty* as living on less than US one dollar (PPP) per day, and *moderate poverty* as less than two dollar a day. If this definition is followed then almost 28 percent of the developing world's population in 1990 and 21 per cent in 2001 come under *extreme poverty*.⁸

In India, Below Poverty Line (BPL) is an economic benchmark and poverty threshold used by the government of India to indicate economic disadvantage and to identify individuals and households in need of government assistance and aid. It is determined using various parameters which vary from state to state and within states. The poverty line was originally fixed in terms of income/food requirements in 1978. It was stipulated that the calorie standard for a typical individual in rural areas was 2400 calorie and was 2100 calorie in urban areas. As per the 10th Five Year Plan (2002-07), BPL in rural

* Andhra Pradesh Urban Services for the Poor (APUSP) is a partnership project between the government of Andhra Pradesh and the UK Department for International Development (DFID) aimed at achieving a sustained reduction in the vulnerability and poverty of the urban poor in Andhra Pradesh.

** The purchasing power parity (PPP) theory uses the long-term equilibrium exchange rate of two currencies to equalize their purchasing power. Developed by Gustav Cassel in 1920, it is based on the law of one price: the theory states that, in ideally efficient markets, identical goods should have only one price.

areas is based on the degree of deprivation in respect of 13 parameters (with scores from 0-4) – land holding, type of house, clothing, food security, sanitation, consumer durables, literacy status, labour force, means of livelihood, status of children, type of indebtedness, reasons for migrations etc. While in urban areas, BPL was based on degree of deprivation in respect of seven parameters – roof, floor, water, sanitation, education level, and type of employment and status of children in a house.⁹ The following table shows the bare minimum income to support the food requirements and not other basic essential items like health, education etc. This income is considered as an economic benchmark in deciding the BPL in India.

TABLE 1: Income levels as the bench mark for BPL

Year	Rural (Rs. per head per month)	Urban (Rs. per head per month)
1978	61.80	71.30
2000-01	328	454
2005-06	368	560

Based on BPL, ration cards*** are distributed by the government. There are three types of ration cards: (1). Antyodaya ration cards, issued to the poorest of the poor, (2). Below Poverty Line (BPL) cards, (3). Above Poverty Line (APL) cards. On the basis of their economic condition, people can buy goods like foodgrains, sugar, kerosene, etc. at varying prices, with the help of their ration cards.

DEFINITIONS OF SLUMS

International Definitions

Considering a poor community as slum has a number of ambiguities attached to it. This is because the word 'slum' does not have clear or universally agreed definitions. The concept of slums and its definition vary from country to country depending upon the socio-economic conditions of the society.¹⁰ Many efforts are currently underway for a universal and a more quantitative definition of slum. Divergent opinions exist as to what constitutes a slum. United Nations agency UN-Habitat defined slum as *a run-down area of a city characterized by substandard housing and squalor and lacking in tenure security*. UN-Habitat in its *Global Report on Human Settlements 2003* brings out the

***Ration card is a card issued by a government allowing the holder to obtain certain rations. Ration cards have been an important part of the Public Distribution System (PDS) in India.

following features of the concept: Slums are too complex to define according to one single parameter, slums are a relative concept and what is considered as a slum in one city will be regarded as adequate in another city – even in the same country, local variations among slums are too wide to define universally applicable criteria, slums change too fast to render any criterion valid for a reasonably long period of time and the spatial nature of slums means that the size of particular slum areas is vulnerable to changes in jurisdiction or spatial aggregation.¹¹

According to the operational definition recommended by United Nations Expert Group Meeting (EGM) held in Nairobi from 28 to 30 October 2002, a slum is an area that combines the following characteristics: *inadequate access to safe water; inadequate access to sanitation and other infrastructure; poor structural quality of housing; overcrowding and insecure residential status*. While the UN-Habitat defines a slum household as a group of individuals living under the same roof in an urban area that lacks one or more of the following: (1). *Durable housing of a permanent nature that protects against extreme climate conditions*. (2). *Sufficient living space which means not more than three people sharing the same room*. (3). *Easy access to safe water in sufficient amounts at an affordable price*. (4). *Access to adequate sanitation in the form of a private or public toilet shared by a reasonable number of people*. (5). *Security of tenure that prevents forced evictions*.¹²

Besides the above definitions, a number of other definitions are in usage. The following definition given by *Cities Alliance Action Plan* is one of them: *Slums are neglected parts of cities where housing and living conditions are appallingly poor. Slums range from high density, squalid central city tenements to spontaneous squatter settlements without legal recognition or rights, sprawling at the edge of the city. Among the defining characteristics of poor urban settlements are: uncertain or illegal land tenure; minimal or no infrastructure; low income, high-density settlements; and lack of recognition by formal governments*.

Indian Definitions

According to the Census of India Slum Population 2001, definitions and concepts of slums vary considerably across states in India. Most often these definitions are based upon the socio-economic conditions or local perceptions prevailing in the society. Therefore, slums are by different names in different regions in India due to regional differences. They are called as *Juggi-Jhonpuri* in Delhi, *Jhopadpatti* or *Chawls* in Mumbai, *Ahatis* in Kanpur, *Bustees* in Kolkata, *Cheris* in Chennai and *Keris* in Bangalore. Although they are called by different names in different regions, essentially their physical characteristics are the same in most of these slums. They are usually a cluster of hutments

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with dilapidated and infirm structures having common toilet facilities, suffering from lack of basic amenities, inadequate arrangement for drainage and for disposal of solid wastes and garbage. These inadequacies make the living conditions in slums extremely suboptimal, unhygienic and results in usually higher incidence of air and water borne diseases for the dwellers.¹³

Under Section-3 of the Slum Area Improvement and Clearance Act, 1956, slums have been defined as mainly *those residential areas where dwellings are in any respect unfit for human habitation by reasons of dilapidation, overcrowding, faulty arrangements and designs of such buildings, narrowness or faulty arrangement of streets, lack of ventilation, light or sanitation facilities or any combination of these factors which are detrimental to safety, health and morals*. Thus, conceptually slums are compact, overcrowded residential areas (and not isolated or scattered dwellings) unfit for habitation due to lack of one or more of the basic infrastructure like drinking water, sanitation, electricity, sewerage, streets etc.

Following definitions of slums have been adopted for enumeration by the Census of India 2001:

- (i) *All specified areas in a town or city notified as 'Slum' by State, Union Territory Administration or Local Government under any Act including a 'Slum Act'.*
- (ii) *All areas recognized as 'Slum' by State, Union Territory Administration or Local Government, Housing and Slum Boards, which may have not been formally notified as slum under any Act;*
- (iii) *A compact area of at least 300 population or about 60-70 households of poorly built congested tenements, in unhygienic environment usually with inadequate infrastructure and lacking in proper sanitary and drinking water facilities.*

The National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO), India, defines a slum as a *compact settlement with a collection of poorly built tenements, mostly of temporary nature, crowded together usually with inadequate sanitary and drinking water facilities in unhygienic conditions*.¹⁴

CONCLUSION

Various organisations at international and national levels have coined their own definitions for their own working purposes. The above discussed definitions of slum are based on one or more of the following: area, location, boundary, house structure, basic services, population, population density, tenure security, legal recognition, education, income, nutrition, and hygiene.

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Most common among them are house structure, basic services and tenure. Above discussed Indian definitions are mostly based on the lack of/poor basic services, while the international definitions are based on security of tenure besides poor basic services.

International definitions most often may not be applicable to a local scenario, as seen in the case of definition of *extreme poverty* given by the World Bank. It may be noticed that the definition covered a huge proportion of the developing world's population.

As the definition plays a vital role for the settlements to be considered for any developmental activity or to avail other benefits, it is, therefore, necessary to define slums in a more meticulous way. Otherwise, there is a possible danger of the needy settlements to be left out from being considered for development by the development agencies or concerned authorities.

SUGGESTIONS

The following should be considered for defining the slum:

1. Local characteristics should be given preference while defining slums.
2. Workshops may be organized to define slum by inviting different stakeholders involving government, non-government actors, key informants such as academicians, social workers, professionals, and other individuals.
3. As defining slum is a complex task, a holistic approach should be adopted towards understanding various local and global factors that determine the conditions of slums.
4. In India, indicators such as security of tenure should also be taken into account.
5. Flexible definition should be adopted instead of a fixed or rigid definition. This will be of great help, as even the settlements that do not fall within the framework of the given definition but are closer to it can also be considered for developmental activity.
6. Research should be encouraged in this direction.
7. Definition of slums should be revised from time-to-time depending upon the changing trends.
8. For more effectiveness, definitions in the local context instead of the global context should be adopted, as the global definitions may fail to address the local problems and hence may not be applicable to the local conditions.

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FOOTNOTES

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