Missing an Inclusionary Vision for the Urban Poor

What is the issue?

The Tamil Nadu government has released the "**Resettlement and Rehabilitation Policy"** for public comment but it is based on a tired model of peripheral resettlement that fails on social justice.

What is the Resettlement and Rehabilitation Policy about?

- The draft policy aims to ensure that slum dwellers are treated fairly and humanely when they are resettled from objectionable poromboke lands.
- The policy states that it is applicable to encroachment, eviction and displacement undertaken by the departments, statutory authorities and local bodies under various acts and rules.
- The distance from nearest towns or source of employment must be considered to identify land for resettlement.
- Slum dwellers must be accommodated only in areas from where it won't take more than half an hour to reach the nearest urban areas by bus or train.
- The policy mandated the formation of "**Resettlement Committees**" for each resettlement scheme with representation of women, Scheduled Castes, and Scheduled Tribes and voluntary organisations apart from officials from different departments.
- It also mandated the constitution of **State-level and District-level Habitat Development Committees** for inter-departmental coordination, creating basic amenities, delivery of welfare schemes, and redress grievances.
- Lands affected by industrial pollution, environmental degradation, and lands that fell under buffer zones of ecologically sensitive zones must be avoided as resettlement locations.
- It provides for an entitlement matrix which includes subsistence allowance, shifting allowance, employment assistance, availability of public facilities like anganwadis, community halls etc.
- The policy also focussed on capacity building to sensitise officials on the issues involved in the resettlement and conduct of social audit after two years of resettlement.

Why the approach of the policy is considered narrow?

- The policy is premature and is not anchored in a comprehensive housing and habitat policy that defines a framework for affordable housing, slum clearance, and land use.
- The policy restricts its scope to managing procedures for eviction and resettlement and lacks a clear vision of integration and inclusion of vulnerable communities into the mainstream.
- Since a large proportion of urban land across Indian cities lack legal title, the policy builds on a foundation of widespread vulnerability to eviction without recourse.
- The poorly serviced colonies on the peripheries of cities are highlighted in places such as Bawana (New Delhi), Vatwa (Ahmedabad), and Mahul (Mumbai), etc.
- Broken livelihoods, alcohol and substance abuse, criminalisation of youth, and safety threats to women and girls are also endemic to these sites.
- Many residents sell or rent out their allotments and return to informal settlements in the city.
- Regarding the travel time, the nearest urban area could be a small town and a resettlement colony sited a 30-minute bus ride from a small town can effectively ruralise urban workers.
- High drop-out rates of women from the labour force and children from schools have been the norm in these colonies.

What is the history of inclusionary models of slum clearance in Tamil Nadu?

- Tamil Nadu historically led the country in providing large-scale low-income housing through land acquisition or by regularising and upgrading informal settlements.
- The projects of 1980s produced around 57,000 plots in Chennai which are scaleable, cost-effective, and successful in facilitating socio-economic mobility of the residents over long term.
- The projects built mixed-class and mixed-use neighbourhoods by providing plots of varying sizes for different income groups on State-acquired land, and incorporating industrial and commercial spaces within the sites.
- These schemes vastly expanded the supply of affordable housing over time with minimal outlay by the State as families were allowed to design, build, and incrementally expand their homes.
- Despite their peripheral location, they were built near existing developments where trunk infrastructure such as roads, water supply and

public transport was already available.

How can a holistic policy be achieved?

- **Minimal distruption** - A resettlement policy dealing with the city's most vulnerable populations must be visionary, proactive, far-sighted and should ensure minimal disruption of the ecologies of survival and mobility.
- Delhi's slum rehabilitation policy recognises this by defining *in situ* rehabilitation as its principle strategy and relocation is envisaged only in rare cases.
- **Land rights** - Odisha's award-winning slum rehabilitation project which aims to transform urban economies and futures by giving land rights to slum dwellers can be looked upon.
- **Real commitments to integration -** A clear provision of the maximum distance from the previous residence will be better.
- The Delhi policy, for instance, specifies that the alternate accommodation will be provided within a radius of 5 km.
- **Adequate amenities** - A sensitive policy would build measures to ensure the adequacy, quality and timeliness of amenities in resettlement sites.
- Transport facilities must comprise adequate, reliable and affordable arrangements before resettlement to ensure that workers seamlessly maintain their links to their workplaces.
- **Beyond skill development** - Livelihood support cannot simply mean skill development training which almost surely will not translate into employment for an over-40-year-old vendor from the city.
- An effective policy must engage seriously with the complex problems that render these settlements unsafe for women, children and youth.

Reference

1. https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/tn-releases-draft-resettlement-and-rehabilitation-policy/article36975078.ece
2. https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/missing-an-inclusionary-vision-for-the-urban-poor/article37569210.ece

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