

Social dimensions of resettlement of urban poor in high rise buildings: a case study at 'Sahasra' resettlement programme

NC Wickramaarachchi¹ and CU Suwanderathne

The world is continuing to urbanize rapidly, particularly in developing countries. Nearly half of the world's population is now living in urban areas & an increasing proportion of these people are poor. Poverty is a condition of deprivation characterized by an individual's inability to meet basic needs consistent with the level of socio-economic development of the community. The position of the urban poor has always been insecure. "Slums" & squatter settlements, where the urban poor find shelter and housing, as "encroachers" on "public land", they remain at the sufferance of the state and its agencies. Most of these located on or near canal banks or low level lands which are open for natural hazards like floods. High dependency ratio, lack of savings, violence, ill health and child abuse are some of the other main characteristics of these communities.

In Sri Lankan context, up to 1994 government followed number of approaches to address the housing problem of the urban poor. One recent approach is the Sustainable Township Program (STP), where the Sahasa scheme was exercised in 2001. Sahasa complex consist of 671 families in thirteen stories. There are sixteen settlements in Sahasa who lived with inadequate infrastructure facilities, education, health, and banking facilities. Almost all the people were engaged in informal activities like street vendors, cleaners etc. They did not have legal title to the land.

There are a lot of criticisms on this scheme which emphasize on a gap between the social dimensions and living in high. Hence the study attempts to identify the long term implications of resettlement of urban poor in high rise housing.

The study used both primary & secondary data to analyze the problem. Primary data was collected through interviewing people by a structured questionnaire in a sample of 52 households.

Though there are number of arguments that resettlement to high rise housing is not ethical & living in high associated with several problems. But according to the research it was revealed that 81% of the people are satisfied with living in high. Also they are satisfied with their neighbors & Sahasa has increased their social status. The legal title to the land is a blessing they have received. There are 88% of the people are satisfied to live in Sahasa. None of them were agree to the opinion of giving up Sahasa.

Keywords: Poverty, Urban, Housing, Low income settlement, Urban resettlement, High rise buildings

¹ Department of Estate Management and Valuation, University of Sri Jayawardenepura, Sri Lanka