

# VOICE FOR CHANGE

**CityMakers Seeking to  
Reclaim Cities They Build**

**A Praxis Publication (2013)**



# **VOICE FOR CHANGE**

**Part II: CityMakers Seeking  
to Reclaim Cities They Build**

**A Praxis Publication (2013)**

ISBN Number: 978-81-89722-08-1

Voice for Change: CityMakers Seeking to Reclaim Cities They Build



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License.

To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>

Guideline for citation: Praxis 2013. CITYMAKERS SEEKING TO RECLAIM CITIES THEY BUILD. New Delhi

---

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

PREFACE	1
INTRODUCTION: "AS CITYMAKERS, WE ARE SEEKING TO RECLAIM THE CITIES WE BUILD AND MAKE THEM RELEVANT TO US"	2
SECTION I: "OFTEN WE ARE MADE TO BELIEVE THAT WE ARE SECOND-CLASS CITIZENS IN CITIES THAT WE BUILD!"	3
SECTION II: "THERE IS CLEARLY A WALL BETWEEN US AND THEM... TO ISOLATE US." IT IS LITERAL AS WELL AS METAPHORICAL.	9
SECTION III: "WHOSE DEVELOPMENT? WHOSE GOALS? DEVELOPMENT CAN BE CALLED DEVELOPMENT ONLY IF IT IS INCLUSIVE"	13
LESSONS FOR A POST 2015 FRAMEWORK	14
ANNEX 1: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	15

## Preface

Praxis – Institute for Participatory Practices is a not-for-profit, autonomous, development organisation, committed to the democratisation of development processes. It is devoted to advocating for community-led development initiatives and governance practices that centralise the perspectives of marginalised groups. In order to do this, Praxis endeavours to identify opportunities and forums in which vulnerable and excluded groups are able to voice their concerns and aspirations in a meaningful way.

Set against the context of a growing interest among global civil society and state actors on the process to decide what should replace the Millennium Development Goals after 2015, a United Nations High-Level Panel has been constituted with three co-chairs, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and the Presidents of Indonesia and Liberia. The High-Level Panel has come up with its report of recommendations in this regard.

Praxis is part of the Participatory Research Group of Participate, initiative co-convened by the Institute for Development Studies, Sussex (IDS) and the global civil society campaign Beyond2015. The on-going participatory research projects are gathering perspectives on the post-2015 debate from the people most affected by poverty and exclusion.

As part of various initiatives to influence post 2015 Development agenda, Praxis has produced a “Voice For Change” series that attempts to enhance participation of vulnerable communities to analyse, dialogue and voice their perspectives on development goals. Praxis acknowledges that participation is not a technical or a mechanical process that can be realised through the application of a set of static and universal tools and techniques, but rather a political process that requires challenging the existing power structures. It sees communities not as objects but as agents of change. The second issue in the Voice For Change series, CityMakers Seeking to Reclaim Cities They Build is focused on women, children and men who live in conditions of poverty in cities they help build and are often left out of development processes because of the stigma attached to their identities. It takes the reader through a series of narratives that are often unheard by those who frame policies and implement programmes - Why do they face marginalisation? Why are they not being treated as citizens? Why are they not heard? Given these, how they envision the world? It is the result of a series of engagements with these groups and attempts to amplify voices of these communities on issues underlying these questions.

The report is based on a participatory research that involved the following stages: (a) community participants facilitated for scripting a participatory video and producing a film; (b) collecting and collating case stories of CityMakers facing different problems and their views on the issues; (c) using participatory tools, facilitating discussions with community participants to cull out different arguments that the analysis needs to contain; and (d) presenting draft report to community participants for their concluding remarks. Case stories pertain to CityMakers in Chennai and Delhi.

Also appended to this report, are audio-visual materials in the form of a participatory video, which was created by members of the urban poor community themselves.

Praxis acknowledges the valuable contributions by Kannagi Nagar Podhunala Sangamam, Chennai, Indo-Global Social Service Society (IGSSS), participants of the Participatory Video process, Realtime, Institute for Development Studies, Participate, and all the CityMakers who shared their experiences, to help produce this document.

**Pradeep Narayanan**  
Director, Research and Consultancies

**Tom Thomas**  
CEO

## Introduction

### **“As CityMakers, we are seeking to reclaim the cities we build and make them relevant to us”**

“There is a recognition that development is not reaching the marginalised. What is worse is that development is, in fact, taking away development from the marginalised.” says Nand Lal a CityMaker and Ground Level Panel member. This is in the context of the urban poor, who make the cities liveable for everyone. The urban poor comprise a very diverse group of women, children and men. They are engaged in loading and unloading goods that are everyday essentials in the urban homes; some provide their services at highly subsidised costs as domestic help; they keep the city clean working to dispose dry as well as wet wastes; many provide the cheap labour hired to run the retail industry and eateries; the more enterprising come up with their own retailing that is seen as street vending and hawking; they provide the artisanal work force that caters to specific needs of the city dwellers; they are the human force behind servicing the transport needs including the ones that are most environment friendly – human pulled carts that transport goods and services, cycle rickshaws; they provide subsidised security and solid waste management through recycling waste; some are in sex-work and a few others are beggars. They include those who live on pavements, in shelter homes, in slums, and those who have been thrown out of the cities into resettlement sites; people without any education, those with little education and those with formal education who have failed to find needed employment. Suffering different extremes of poverty, by and large, the urban poor constitute a group, which literally builds our cities by sweating it out. They are CityMakers, who build roads, metros, flyovers, malls and parks. And then keep them functional and serviced. Are CityMakers being forced to build cities uninhabitable for themselves?

This report explores some of the above issues in more detail. It is divided into three sections.

Section I argues that the CityMakers are not being treated as citizens for they are denied the right to identity, the right to have the Government as their guardian, and the right to be treated equally as other citizens of urban areas.

Section II narrates the experience of stereotyping and marginalisation that CityMakers face, which reflects their ghettoisation.

Section III narrates the priority needs of CityMakers that need to be considered for any post 2015 development agenda.

---

<sup>1</sup>Names of some of the community members have been changed to protect their identity.

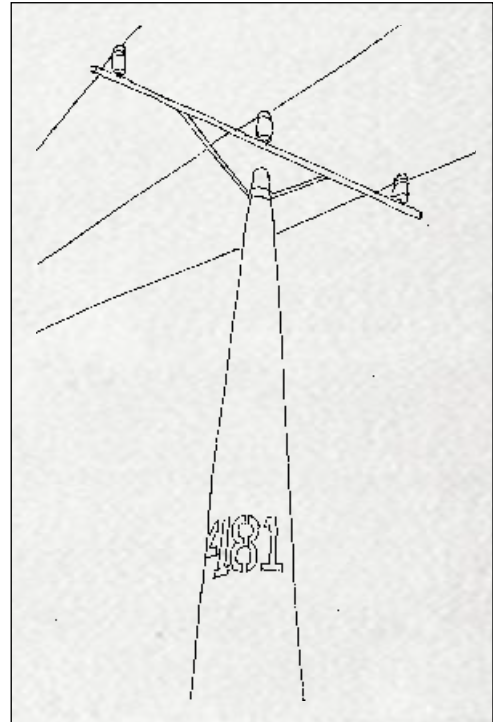


### I: “Often we are made to believe that we are second-class citizens in cities that we build”

“We are the people who help build this city...” claims Manorama from Chennai. “We have a right to this city”, says Radha from Chennai. Their claims are in the context of continuously shrinking spaces and rights of CityMakers over cities, rather than an assertion of their right. Manorama adds, “... but the Government refuses to listen to us or address our needs.” Their claims over the city are continuously thwarted and they live lives of denial and indignity.

“We are denied our Pehchaan (identity)! Only if we have a house can we have an address. When we don't have a house, how can we present proof of residence?”

“Just because we don't have an address does not mean that we do not have an identity.” contests Radha from Chennai. Yet for large numbers of the urban poor, not having an address means being faceless and undocumented. It means living lives on the edge. Madeena's attempts at finding a job in the neighbouring residential colony ended in failure when she was asked to produce identity documents for police verification. “Where do I get them from?” she asks. Parmila, who works as a maid and lives in the Shelter Home at Lodhi Road, Delhi, is anxious about the future of her daughter. “I will soon die but I do not want my children to suffer... I have heard that if we have an identity proof, my daughter can have access to certain facilities... . She is growing up and like any mother I am anxious and fear for her future. I do not want them to lead a life of despair and seclusion as I have lived.” Manto Sa, Delhi, stated that their repeated requests for bank loans were rejected because of lack of identity and address proof. Neela's story is a testimony to how the homeless population has failed to access schemes to the insistence on identity proofs and residential address. She works as a domestic help and lives on the roads of Parrys, Chennai. “Our biggest problem here is the lack of a recognised house address – this in spite of us having lived here for generations. For instance, there is a Government scheme offering loans to women, but when we approached the bank for sanctioning the loans to us, the bank refused on the grounds that we didn't have a permanent house address.” Besides, not having identity proof also increases existing vulnerabilities. “I am a 24 year old native of Madhubani, Bihar. I got married to a man whose family harassed me over dowry. My father did not accept me when I went home. I have a daughter and I need to bring her up. I have been trying to work as a domestic help but the people living in the residential colony just across the road, ask for my documents and police verification. Where do I get them from? I now live in the shelter near Bangla Sahib which is also near a Gurudwara and temple, around which we get something to eat and drink” says Madeena, Delhi.



“Be it a ration card or a voters identity card... . They ask for an address. Only if we have a house can we have an address. When we don't have a house, how can we present proof of residence?” asks a homeless CityMaker in Chennai. “Because we don't have any address, we don't have an identity. Because of this situation, we are unable to even assert and get our basic rights. To live like this each day is very difficult and our life continues being a question mark. We brought together all the evidences that relate to our existence on the streets... we are usually outside the shops or buildings. And tried using these addresses to get the needed ration cards. We even used the number on electricity or telephone posts that are close to where we are to serve as address markers and get the needed Government issued identity cards...” explains Neelawathi.



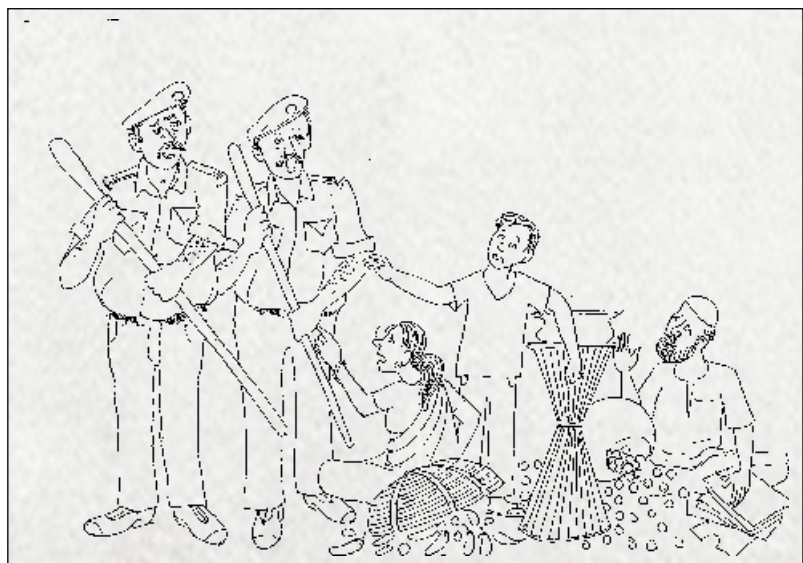
**Government is not the guardian of the people. “We are deprived of our rights and entitlements, because we do not seem to be one among them. Now, whom should we approach?”**

CityMakers often wonder whether the entire system works against their interests. Being victims already, they suffer revictimisation of sorts. Already a victim of a fire accident, Kamala had to sell her belongings to pay Rs. 5000 to get a ration card made. “They don't allow...”, she says. “What proof do you have, they ask me? It can't be made... when everything got burnt... how can I give them proof of my old ration card?...” Many narrated their experiences of losing their ration and identity cards in accidents and never being able to apply for a reissue of these documents because of basic mistrust with which they are viewed by the system.

Often, the CityMakers who have been able to put together a shelter with bare minimums are made homeless again by the local authorities. “This is almost always done through forced evictions in non-compliance by States to the basic requirements in such situations (to give adequate notice, to relocate, to compensate etc) of the UN guidelines on evictions as well as in blatant violation of all existing norms and guidelines prescribed by Government of India and Supreme Court through the National Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy of the Ministry of Rural Development, 2007”, says a leader from an advocacy group working in Chennai for the rights of the urban poor. Amir, who stays in a Shelter Home in New Delhi says, “We have had the misfortune of losing our small jhuggi (slum) during the Commonwealth Games a few years back. I was not with my family back then. I was in Bihar with other relatives and when I returned I saw that the whole area had been swept 'clean' – including our houses. This is why my family and I are living in this shelter – I live in the men's shelter and the rest live on the streets.”

Bhavani, a homeless person, explains how her complaint on sexual abuse was distorted into a case of illegal occupation of the street by the homeless, leading to extraction of money by the police. She says, “As we sleep on the pavements, passers by and rowdies come and sexually abuse us. If we complain to the police, they do not take it seriously and ask unwanted questions. The policemen are there not to protect us, but to get some bribe for their luxurious lifestyle.” Mariam from Chennai explains what it means for women to live on pavements. “Life here is especially difficult for women – there is neither privacy nor safety. At nights – when we are sleeping on the streets, we sometimes wake up to find strange men lying next to us or watching us!”

The clampdown on petty street vending has snatched from large sections of the urban poor the very right to earn a livelihood. Sarsa works as a flower seller in Parris. She has cooked, eaten, bathed and slept on the streets all her life. “Since last year the Government has been objecting to people like me selling flowers on the streets – they say that street vendors add to the traffic congestion in the area and are a public nuisance. We have stayed the court order to have us forcefully removed from this place. Despite this, we have to watch out for the police who try to chase and fine us if they find us selling our goods or handmade items on the streets. We have no other skills and do not know how to do any other work. If the government and the police succeed in stopping us from selling our goods we would lose our livelihood. I am 43 years old now and am too old to learn any new skill or job.” Mary voiced similar opinions on their right to earn a living.



“Some organisations say that we have the right to sell things on the street as we are not commercial enterprises and we do this for a living. They even say that the government will be setting up a special area for us in Parris to sell our things, but not only is this not happening, the authorities have also been getting more and more tough on us as the days go by.”

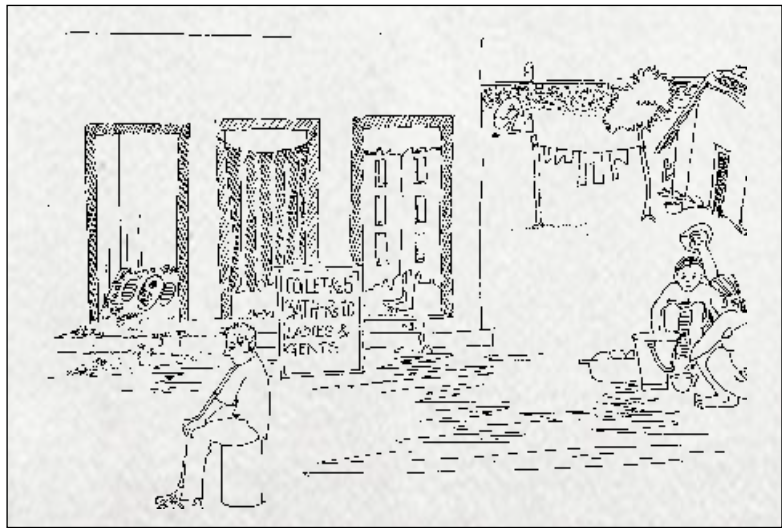
Cities deny them even the freedom of movement that is constitutionally guaranteed. In the run-up to the Commonwealth Games in Delhi, movements of the urban poor within the city were restricted in the name of security. Basic freedoms enjoyed by citizens are denied to the urban poor, either on the pretext of security or beautification or simply because of a status conscious minority. Large numbers of the urban poor lack several other basic freedoms and rights - the right to be heard and the right to justice, for instance are widely violated. Many voiced their concern over the fact that for the poor there is no opportunity to seek justice. “For the poor there is no sunwai (hearing)” “I did not get sunwai” “Why does the government do this... there is no sunwai”

They are so powerless that the police often round them up just so the police can use this as an opportunity to show that their targets have been achieved. Bhavani, says, “If the police don't have sufficient cases for the month or any theft case, they take some of the homeless people and put them in the jail.” Suresh sums this up – “I drive this cart. Sometimes it becomes pretty late when I come back and on those days I cannot sleep properly as the police wake me up and book me on account of suspicion. We live in these streets. We don't have basic amenities... . But does that mean we don't have freedom as well?”

“We are not part of their consultative system... our rights of privacy, freedom are not respected... even when we complain we are targeted stating that because you are like this... it would anyway happen to you... In fact, the society knows that we are not heard. Often the view is that what we say should not be taken at face value... even our truths get interrogated,” says Munara from New Delhi. A weeping Rama Devi from Delhi says emphatically “I get nothing from the government... .no I get nothing from the government... .so I have taken to begging to survive... . What else can I do”. Latika Devi who has been uprooted several times over from various places in Delhi has lost even the hopes of receiving any help from the government to enable her to survive. “I am very comfortable in this night shelter... . . . if I stayed outside on the roads they would have torn me to pieces and devoured me... . . .if I get food (from the government) it is okay... if I don't get anything even that is fine” she says as she resigns to her present realities after losing all hopes of a better future.

**“Why do I have to pay more than others for the same entitlements?” Despite being poor, CityMakers struggle to get equal access to entitlements and services.**

The lack of basic identity proof further increases marginalisation of the urban poor. Not only are basic entitlements not available to them, they also end up paying more to get what other citizens are entitled to. The urban poor pay higher rents, higher water and electricity bills, and also pay for basic sanitation. “We don't have sanitation facility in this place, so we need to pay Rs.5 every time for nature's call” says Bhavani, Chennai. Lalitha, who has been living in a Chennai slum for the last twenty years says, “In this slum, we have to pay for water for drinking, cooking and washing and we are allowed a maximum of only 6 pots a day.



Most of us do not have ration cards and so we cannot buy rice and oil at the Government subsidised rates.” “We sleep on the pavements or sides of streets or shopfronts or in parking lots. There is a common water pump, which serves close to 150 families, and we need to pay for using basic amenities like toilets. We pay Rs. 5 to use the toilet and Rs.10 for bathing.” Says Mariam from Chennai. “Adults use toilets or defecate outside. People defecate outside or on the streets if they cannot afford to pay to use the toilets but when children do the same, stones are thrown at them and the police beats them up.”

Often CityMakers are treated as dispensable. “Because the government says that we are to be moved out, we are not given any basic amenities or services. Toilets, balwadis (crèches), water... nothing is made available here”, laments Vinod who lives in Ambedkar Colony Slums and needs to support his young wife and infant daughter by driving a hired auto rickshaw. “...at least allow us the right to access our livelihoods and other basic amenities and services with dignity and without being discriminated...”, pleads Chandramukhi from Chennai. The vast majority of the urban poor continue to live lives without even the most rudimentary amenities and entitlements. “We got nothing”, says Sarita Devi who was evicted from Shastri Nagar area in Delhi for construction of the metro line. “We were left to live amidst garbage. We begged the babus to give us some amenities (suidha)... I neither get old age pension, nor have any identity proof to access any scheme” A lucky few among the homeless find their way to shelter homes. “I have moved around all the shelter homes”, says Savita who works as a domestic help. Kannagi who lives on the streets and parks of Chennai lost the space that had served as her shelter in 2011 to some development project work. “Every night we go to sleep not knowing if we will still live here tomorrow.” she said.

Education and health are two basic pillars for levelling inequalities. However, there is no proactive programme to ensure these rights to CityMakers. Denial of education leads to a chain of denials, the impact of which is felt in all areas throughout life. Shikha Rajbanshi of New Delhi spoke of how the lack of formal education is a constraint. She said, “We do not get opportunities like others because we do not have proper formal education. Our parents, like all other parents, also dream about a bright future for us ... but they kill their dreams for the purpose of survival...” Basic health facilities are not available to the vast majority of the urban poor.

Damodharan, a CityMaker who was forcefully evicted from the slums in Pudhupet and placed in the Kannagi Nagar Relocation site near Chennai, says, “If my children get sick, there is no hospital here. See what a situation I am in now. The way my children used to be when they were there is not how they are now. They are so unhealthy here. See the

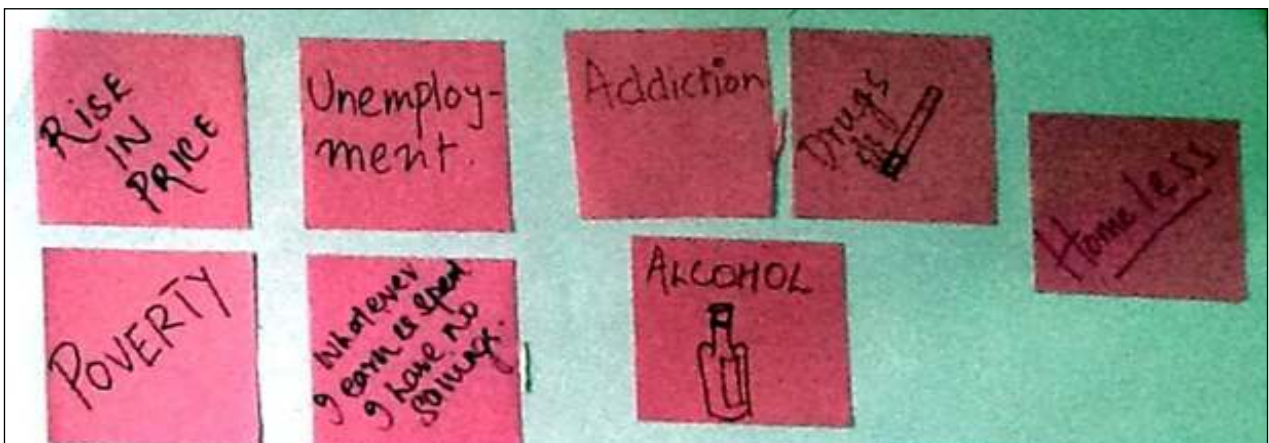


garbage all over. Is any one clearing the garbage? Is anyone doing anything?” Absence of free health care pushes families into a vicious circle of poverty and indebtedness. “My second daughter met with a major road accident two years back. A man on a motorbike rode over her legs while she was resting on the streets. She had to be hospitalised for a whole year when different implants had to be laid in her leg to get her walking again. As we live right on the streets, these kinds of accidents are common. Earlier it was my father's sickness that got us spiralling into poverty from which we have not been able to recover. And now my daughters accident, ... Last year when my daughter was in the hospital, I could not do any work, as I had to be with her round the clock looking after her. During this time my mother and I got indebted by more than Rs. 40,000. Though we were in the Government hospital, we spent at least Rs. 22,000 on my daughter's treatment and I could not work as I had to be in the hospital taking care of her. I had taken Rs. 20,000 from two persons and I need to return back the money on a daily basis – Rs. 200 every day...”, shares Mary, who has been a homeless CityMaker living on the NSC Bose road in Chennai.

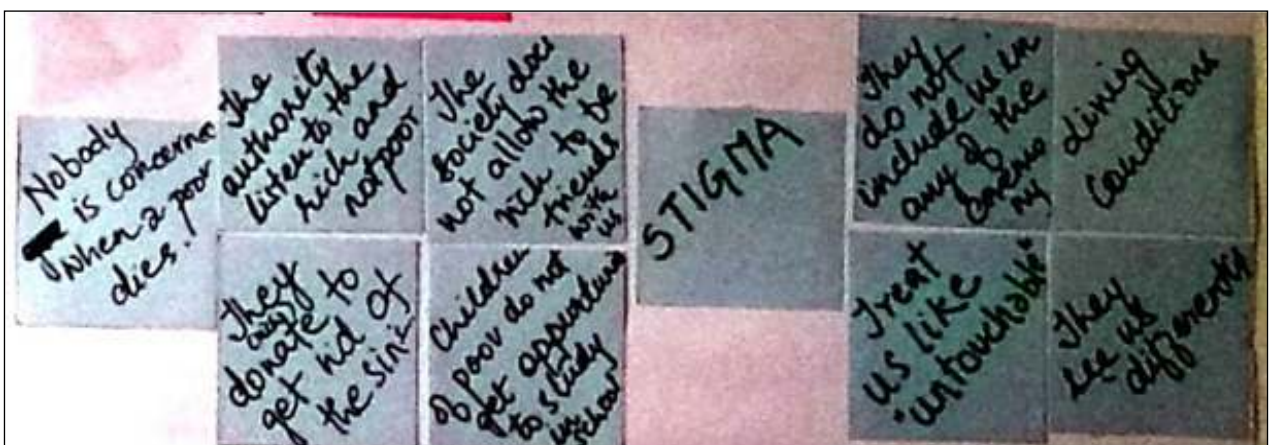
“Petrol price-hike evokes public and media outcry immediately, but situation of slums and deprivation of CityMakers do not even evoke sympathies among leaders, media and middle class- who are all beneficiaries of our efforts”. These words from a CityMaker indicate widespread inequalities that push CityMakers into a walled enclosure.

In a discussion with a group of CityMakers in Delhi, the following issues emerged. Similar issues emerged in discussions with other groups.

Issues they face:



Types of discrimination:



Manifestations of this:



Being denied “pehchaan”, “guardians” and “equality”, the predominant emotion among CityMakers is that they are not wanted in the city.” “The authorities are indifferent to our plight and consider us only a headache”, says Mariam from Chennai. There is no consultation for any decision. “We were staying in the slums inside Chennai. Because we are from the disadvantaged caste groups, the authorities think that they can pick us up from anywhere, anytime, and throw us anywhere without even consulting with us as we cannot do anything against them. And so they forcefully got us in garbage lorries and dumped us here”, says Stephen Raj, one of the community leaders in Kannagi Nagar outside Chennai.

The last decade has seen enormous investments in urban areas through different flagship schemes. Availability of funds also saw mushrooming of corporate trustees, fund managers and highly corporatised private-public entities that are floated as para-statal bodies often making significant decisions. With urban local bodies relegated to a space that is just namesake, affected citizens of the city have had little say in the courses of events and development projects that have been planned in the very sites where they have been living and working for generations. CityMakers form a powerless part of the urban population. “Decisions have been made but without any agreement having been reached and this denies the existence of CityMakers as citizens who have an equal right to the city as decision makers”, says a leader from an advocacy group working in Chennai for the rights of the urban poor.

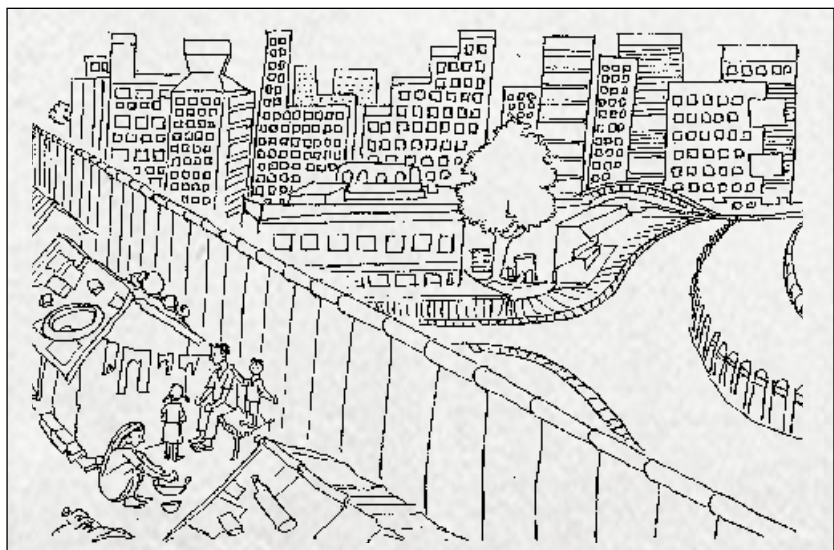


## II: “There is clearly a wall between us and them... to isolate us.” It is literal as well as metaphorical.

“There is clearly a wall between us and them”, says Ram Lal from Delhi. “People who live in jhuggis are treated as insects (keede makode)... those who live in big buildings are considered human beings. Aren't those who live in slums also human beings?... Do human beings live only in big buildings?” asks Sheela Devi. The experience of segregation and isolation within larger society is increasingly being felt and resented by the urban poor. The feeling of not being part of society was expressed by several people.

**Isolation:** The metaphor of a wall dividing the rich and the poor in cities is often a reality that the poor live with. Deewakar talks about the wall erected by the railway police to cordon off the subway. This wall has been erected right in front of his shop. “We can do nothing till this wall is removed... Else we will die right there at the gate of the wall.” Kamal who lives in a slum in Chennai says, “The area where we live is getting smaller and smaller. We are being packed closer and closer together and are hemmed on three sides by concrete walls which segregate the slum dwellings from the apartment buildings and the hospital.” They surely are not able to fight with corporates who are expanding their spaces of operations in the city. “Because we are from the Scheduled Caste community and they think we cannot question them, industrial giant TVS, ESI hospital and other government people keep taking our land and crushing us into this small space with their walls” laments Essamma who lives with her husband and baby girl in Ambedkar Colony Slums of Chennai.

**Narrowing mindsets:** The urban poor explained what it means to have a wall between them and the rest of the society. The most commonly perceived manifestation of this wall is in terms of social segregation. People narrated experiences of being treated as social outcasts. “We do not get invited to their events... there are restrictions for us in public places... if anyone makes friends with us, they are scolded and in fact they get marginalised.” The 'have nots' (urban poor) are despised and loathed by the 'haves' in cities, symbolising perhaps a



new form of the caste system, wherein the urban poor are bracketed as outcasts and treated with contempt. An example cited by a domestic help about a posh residential colony on the outskirts of Delhi, “This colony has separate gates for entry of service providers... as if we are lesser than human beings”. “Yahan pe sab bhed bhav karte hain. “Everyone discriminates here even though we all have the same blood”. “Bhed bhaav” (discrimination) between the rich and the poor was a recurrent phrase in the discussions.

**Stereotyping:** Urban poor are increasingly seen as criminals, drug addicts, alcoholics, unclean, burdens, and this nature of labelling feeds into the process of social segregation. Prabhu Lal from Delhi states “Whether anyone is drug addict or not, we are increasingly recognised as that...” Dinanath's statement is a testimony to how one's background becomes the basis on which one's truth is established. “I am poor... so I am a criminal too. It is all about

one's background... I don't have property or a job to save myself...". "I am poor so it is assumed that I am a criminal". Mariam's statement about how the authorities consider them only a headache (see previous section) is reminiscent of the same stereotyping. The experience of being homeless, jobless, uneducated is not just the experience of lacking a house, a job or education. In the case of the urban poor, this is coupled with and worsened by feelings of exclusion, of being left out.

Cities are increasingly developing parallel school systems. "... one for the rich and one for the poor..." remarks Yunus from Delhi. He further says "because we are stigmatised... society does not allow their children to have an interface with our children..." Exclusion based on which part of the city one lives in is also experienced in the search for employment. "Once they know that we are from this locality, any good job is beyond our reach". Daniel makes a living dancing and performing in a dance troupe. He lives in Ambedkar Colony Slums. "Youth like myself are not able to access any job opportunity because we belong to the scheduled caste. Secondly because we are poor, even if we are just walking in the main road, people look at us very discriminatorily and police simply call us and torture (harass) us". Stephen lives in one of the largest relocation sites near Chennai though he was earlier a resident of San Thome Slums near the Marina Beach. Citing



threats of a coming tsunami, they were forcefully evicted and dumped in garbage-carrying lorries to Kannagi Nagar, that was built for relocating the CityMakers even before the tsunami came. "In the last eight years - be it our children or the adults; be it going to school or work - it has been very difficult. When we go to the IT companies that are close by, they just reject us and say 'you carry with you the seal that you are from Kannagi Nagar and we cannot offer you any job' and they shoo us away". "If we go searching for employment from Kannagi Nagar, we are never able to get any. The minute we say we are from Kannagi Nagar, we don't get any work. We need the right to live a life without being stigmatised. We are also human beings. They speak so ill of us. Just because one person does something wrong, all of us get affected. Why are they doing that?" asks Maheshwari who is unable to access any employment just because she resides in Kannagi Nagar. "We do all the work... but just because we are from Kannagi Nagar, we are being denied opportunities. When we give our address proof, no one is willing to give us work. We need to have the right to live in this city with dignity. Even after we were kicked out of San Thome, after our homes were burnt and the tsunami came, we still are not able to live peacefully. We are always being harassed". "We are not able to go out and look for a job", adds her friend. Absence of an address or the presence of the same are both used against the urban poor to marginalise and exclude them from accessing their rights and entitlements.

### **"Lack of Citizenship coupled with stigmatisation defines the desolate lives of CityMakers"**

Exclusion manifests itself in the form of deprivation. CityMakers are deprived not only of shelter and public spaces but also a range of other services and entitlements, which are the reasons that cities are considered more habitable than rural areas.

**Facing Evictions:** Spaces allocated for the urban poor are shrinking. “The last 10 years have been more peaceful. But now people keep saying that these areas are going to be cleared up to make the area a better area. But that is not going to be better for us. We will have to start all over again. Over these years we have been able to assert our identity because we have been continuously in this one place. But now we are being slowly squeezed out.” says Paanchalaamma, Chennai. Slums, which are seen as scars on the metropolitan world class look of cities, are being razed to the ground to make way for hotels, flyovers, buildings, parks and even parking lots. Voicing the powerlessness of the urban poor, Rama from Chennai says, “We are powerless, our voices are not heard and the vested interests that want to take this land have the power of money backing them.” Forced evictions have become the rule rather than the exception. Cities are being cleansed of slums and the urban poor are being thrown out on the outskirts of the city into resettlement sites.

The building of the physical infrastructure of the city is again reminiscent of an exclusionary process at work. Urban planning is premised on an understanding of the urban poor as dispensable. “Because we are dispensable, we can be evicted. So, slums that come in the way of the metro route can be demolished and the 'evictable' population can be pushed to the outskirts of the city. In areas that are inhabited by the population which is not considered 'evictable', for instance Connaught Place, the metro goes underground!”. The need to build parking lots where the rich can park their fancy cars thus gains precedence over the basic requirement of shelter for the poor. So, a slum settlement is demolished to build a parking lot.

**Homelessness:** Arjun from New Delhi says, “We are homeless. We stay here only, under the tree (beside the entrance of the subway in front of coffee home, near Hanuman Mandir in CP). We had a jhuggi in Motia Khan, Paharganj, from which we were evicted forcefully in the year 2000.” Mary from Chennai pointing to the busy NSC Bose Road in front of her says, “This is where I was born and brought up.”

**Relocation disrupting Livelihood:** “I'm a house wife not out of choice – but because we have no employment opportunities here. The households in this area refuse to hire us because Kannagi Nagar has a bad reputation”, says Vanitha. Large sections of the urban poor remain unemployed in sprawling and growing cities burgeoning with business. She adds, “We can do nothing unless we get employment. We need employment to raise and educate our children. Poor people like us are not even given opportunities for employment.” Manoj who worked as a plumber and lived in a slum of Chennai for 35 years was relocated. Four years since his relocation, he remains unemployed. He compares the experience of losing his livelihood and not being able to find a new source of employment to 'being trapped'. We've lost our old jobs and cannot find any employment in this new place – we are trapped!” “We want employment from the government!” says Rahim from Delhi.

**Reminiscence of the Past:** Memories of being uprooted from his village are fresh in the mind of Arjun. “My father migrated to Delhi in 1972 from Solapur, Maharashtra, to escape the great drought. I was six years old then. From what I heard when I was a kid, if we hadn't migrated, we would have died because of the drought. We do sometimes in few years visit our relatives in Solapur, but there is no way that we can stay there as there is no livelihood option” Comparing his present living conditions in the city with life in the village, Ramlal of Delhi said “I would definitely want to stay back in the village with my family but the

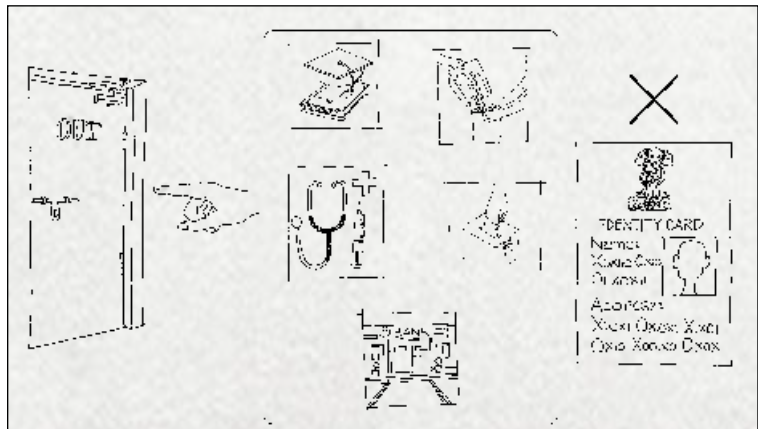


condition is bad there too... .It is a tough life anywhere... .in the village or here in Delhi ... .but here I have a job.” Mohd. Minto, a resident of the shelter home at Lodhi Road, Delhi, echoed similar emotions, “The city is not a place for us but we cannot survive in the village because there is no work.” The search for employment opportunities brings a large number of them to the cities. “We came here in search of better livelihood opportunities. We don't have any agricultural land back home... .Most of the male members of our village migrate to urban centres in search of livelihood opportunities”, says Manto Sa, Delhi. “In the past our parents came to this place in search for work as a coolie (porter)... .” Bhavani, Chennai. Baiju says, “I migrated from Murshidabad in the year 1997 to seek better employment and a sustained income”. Regardless of the reasons that force people to come to cities and swell the ranks of the urban poor, the feeling of being uprooted and disowned remains paramount. Once in cities, the urban poor are again at the continuous threat of evictions.

**Education:** Lalita, who works as a maid (domestic help) and lives at a Shelter Home in New Delhi says, “I have not been educated. If I was, I am certain that my life would be very different and I would not be as helpless as I am today”. The urban poor see an unmistakable link between the sufferings and hardships that they live through and the fact that they are uneducated. Shikha Rajbanshi, Delhi is of the opinion that lack of formal education limits the opportunities. “We do not get opportunities like others because we do not have proper formal education.”

Those who can afford private education are opting for privately run schools. “I would like my grandchildren to be educated well, so I am motivating my son and daughter to put them in good schools. Even though private school education is expensive, I would like my grandchildren to get good private school education rather than at the poorly maintained government schools”, says Kannamma, Chennai.

**Health:** Thousands perish as a result of denial of medical services in cities, which boast of the most modern hospitals and sophisticated medical facilities. Shabnam, a construction worker at Lodhi Road, New Delhi lost two of her sons to diseases. They died without treatment. Her husband was on the verge of death on the roads of Delhi when some passerby took him to the hospital. “There are at least 500 children who suffer like my child (mental retardation). There is no hospital that I can take my child to. There is no work... and they ask for rent to stay here... how am I supposed to spend money on helping my child access better health?” – Antonyamma who was forcefully relocated to the Kannagi Nagar Relocation site near Chennai from the slums in Ayanavaram.



### III: “Whose Development? Whose Goals? Development can be called development only if it is inclusive”

Here is how the poor see some of the icons of the recent spate of development that the national capital has seen.

“Life has become hell because of this flyover”

“We built the metro, but we cannot enter the metro station... Half of us cannot afford to pay and... the rest, though they can afford it, prefer not to enter fearing bad treatment at being shabbily dressed...”

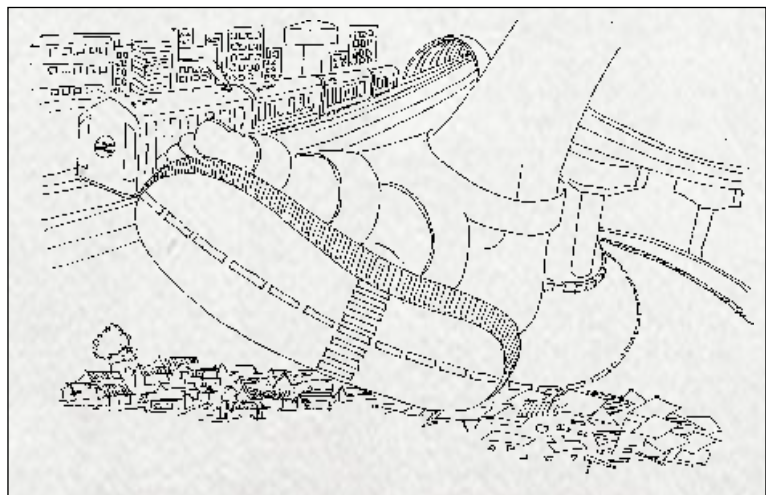
“We have been thrown away like garbage”, says Rajesh who lost his slums to one of the many flyovers that were built in Delhi in the run up to the Commonwealth Games.

“So many people were trampled because of this flyover.... Why is this being done.... Nobody listens to us”

“This city (Chennai) was built by us. Should we the CityMakers leave the city? We will definitely not leave this city. Give us housing here itself within a radius of 2 to 3 kilometres so that our livelihoods are not affected. Then we will leave the pavements. If not, we will not leave”, asserts Bhawani who resides on the pavements of NSC Bose road adjacent the Flower Bazaar Bus stand in Parrys, Chennai.

“Every time I look at the metro or flyover, I do not think of these being ‘wonders’ but as something that uprooted my life.” says Arvind from New Delhi.

If what development has come to personify for the city dwellers is seen by the city builders as symbols of being uprooted, destroyed and cast away, there is clearly a need to rethink the course of development. While hundreds of slums are regularly bulldozed to pave the way for roads, flyovers, and the metro, has any residential middle class locality ever faced the brunt of demolition for the sake of development?



The question that arises is whose development is being championed and expounded by states and by the MDGs? For which side of the wall have the goals been set? Can we possibly chalk out a development plan, which does not address the process of exclusion so obviously at work in cities and showcase it as the panacea? Can we possibly propose that the development trajectory, which has been visualised by the international community will equally benefit both sides of the wall? Is maternal health even an issue in the lives of women who live and give birth on the roads? Does empowerment of women mean the same to women on both sides of the wall? Will the goal of universal primary education, if and when achieved, place before the children of the urban poor, the same opportunities that are available to the children of the rich?



## Lessons for a Post 2015 framework

Interactions with the CityMakers reinforces concerns about exclusion, vulnerability, inequality and deprivation- all of which have featured in the post MDG discussions in different national and international forums. The isolation and contempt with which CityMakers have been living and the multiple forms of deprivations they suffer must be addressed head on in the post MDG framework. To be meaningful in the lives of CityMakers - a people who compare and visualise the treatment they have received from society to the treatment meted out to insects, (“People who live in jhuggis are treated as insects (keede makode)” Sheela Devi) the MDGs and the national planning and decision making process need to focus on structural and attitudinal changes. Voices of the CityMakers leave no doubt about the fact that development has by and large failed to reach large sections; the urban poor are treated like “second class citizens” in the very cities that they have literally built; they lack identity and basic entitlements; they have been denied the care and guardianship of the state; and they are increasingly losing hopes for justice.

The real issues today for CityMakers happen to be the absence of citizenship identity, increasing ghettoisation, the mindset which views them as burdens and dispensable, and denial of state guardianship. Until the walls are broken, many like Deewakar will continue to live lives that have been devastated by development projects and many like Sarita Devi will continue to live amidst garbage. What needs rethinking is what kind of development we want and what price we are willing to pay for it. What also merits a consideration is whether only the “evictable” urban poor should bear the brunt of development or whether the cost should be fairly shared by the middle classes, the rich and the affluent.

The planning and policy formulation process of the country would be far more sensitive towards the needs of the CityMakers, if it broke free from the shambles of stereotyping. The CityMakers are by and large viewed as burden on services and infrastructure. “Finally while we are a group with similar problems facing similar deprivation, do protect us from stereotyping... slums would have probably same proportion of drug-addicts and criminals as rest of the city... do not necessarily brand everyone in the same way...” appeals Kumar from Delhi.

Further, planners see only the “deprivations” and not the reasons of deprivations. Often, the issues of CityMakers are reduced to compartments of health, education, shelter and such other rights. “We do not want any special provisions... we just want recognition... we want the same as that the rest of the city dwellers have access to... we want to be treated as citizens... with identity.” says Mangal from Delhi. Prakash chimes in, “The Government and the rest of the society will not accept that... Rather they will be happy to provide the rightful benefits as special provisions”.

The rights of the CityMakers to basic amenities and entitlements and mainstreaming their concerns in the development trajectory can be strengthened tremendously if they are recognised as tax payers. Stressing on the fact that they pay taxes, Surojeet says “Often in the discussions, we are not recognised as tax payers... every product that we buy, we pay taxes... we may not be paying income tax...but that's because we don't have income and access to livelihood..” They do not have access to sensitive duty bearers that pushes them further into a cycle of deprivation and marginalisation.

To understand the structural barriers it is also imperative that the marginalised be provided regular space to engage with the state. Explaining the need for this space Mohan Prakash says, “We want space in policy making and policy discussions. We want to be empowered to reflect our interest in policy settings... if that is ensured, we will claim what is due to us - from health to education. That is political change...” Recognition of CityMakers as human beings with inalienable human rights, rightful citizens of a democratic country entitled to services and infrastructure like all other sections of society would go a long way in bringing about this political change.

## **Annex 1: Acknowledgements**

Praxis acknowledges the valuable contributions by Kannagi Nagar Podhunala Sangamam, Chennai, Indo-Global Social Service Society (IGSSS), participants of the Participatory Video process, Realtime, Institute for Development Studies, Participate, and all CityMakers who shared their experiences, to help produce this document.

The names of the participants of the Participatory Video processes facilitated in Chennai and Delhi are:

Chennai: Amulu, Bharathi, Bhawani, Daniel, Neelawathi, Pandian, Stephen Raj, Sudha, Vinoth and Yessamma

Delhi: Avishek, Brij Kishor, Kalicharan, Mukhtar, Nand Lal, Pawan, Pinki, Pushpendra and Surendra

The following members of the Praxis team contributed to compiling and producing this document: Ajai, Anusha, Aruna, Deepti, Insha, Kavitha, Lorina, Mary, Mohan, Moulasha Paromita, Pavitra, Pradeep, Preet, Ruhul, Shalini, Sharmistha, Sowmyaa, Stanley and Vikas

The concepts shared visually and verbally by community members found creative expression through the artistic strokes of Shirshendu Ghosh.





## About Praxis

Praxis - Institute for Participatory Practices is a knowledge-based, not-for-profit development support organisation, registered in 1997 under the Indian Societies Registration Act of 1860. Since its humble beginnings, Praxis has emerged as an independent one-stop centre for undertaking action research, training and documentation dealing with multiple facets of participatory development. Our work vindicates the growing mandate across geographical boundaries that for development to be sustainable and equitable, there is an urgent need to ensure good governance practices and processes. Our strategic networking capability with like-minded people and organisations helps maximise our outreach and increases manifold the impact of our interventions.

## Our Vision

A world without poverty in which every person has the right to participate in decision-making processes, and to a life with dignity and choices.

## Our Mission

To strive for the democratisation of development processes and institutions to ensure that the voices of poor women, men, transgenders, girls and boys are heard and acted upon.

## In collaboration with



**PRAXIS**

ISBN

