

Urban Development through the Eyes of the Underprivileged

Sub-Title: Reimagining the Course of Slum Redevelopment, A Case of Bangalore

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About the author: An architecture student with various interests and beliefs in a scattered manner. Trying to understand how modern, vernacular and affordability have connections and can be integrated in the actual world. “Understanding perspectives instead of Judging” has been the most helpful advice received.

Abstract

Urban development over the past few decades has been rapid and evident, while in contrast it has led to the increase in the number of slums in cities year after year; the reason being that Urban Development is not exactly inclusive in nature. It is important to understand the reasons behind this crucial matter since it directly effects the urban structure of a city. Though there are a lot of initiatives taken by NGOs and by the Government of India, there is still a delay in the development of the city and renewal of slums.

So, this paper will look towards the vision of urban development if the underprivileged people living in a city had a chance to design the cities. Further we will be talking about the different ideas from different individuals as to how they would like to design their own habitats/cities and bring in the angle of inclusivity that is largely astray.

Keywords: Reimagining, Underdeveloped, Urban Development, Slum Renewal/Redevelopment, Slum Rehabilitation.

Introduction

The one thing which motivates us to go through our daily lives are aspirations, some have very broad aspirations whereas, some have such limited aspirations that you could rather term them as requirements. In this paper, we try to ask people who are underprivileged to bring forth their aspirations through words or sketches regarding the idea of home which was lost amidst the daily struggle of their lives. The paper aims to understand the current living conditions of the underprivileged. This would include spaces inside their house, amenities they have, spaces directly outside their houses and the public spaces around them. This would then help us create an image of how the urban scape would look like if designed by the underprivileged.

Literature Review

Through the study of different slums which were displaced, we understand that the promises made by the government or authorities and people's expectations were the last things that were actually considered when the homes were provided (Slums in Jagdalpur, 2011) (Saharan, 2018) (Kaur, 2019) (Crooks, Mahabir, Croitoru, & Agouris, 2016). Treating the housing only as a shell is unfair towards the people and will only lead to problems in the future (Athavankar, 2010). One of the solutions that is being worked on throughout the world is how to help the people displaced from the slums to have their own source of income (Shweni, 2017). The spaces in a slum vary a lot in sizes and tell us how we could do so much in very little of a space and people will still be satisfied (Amaya, 2014). Integration of public spaces in the initial phase of the planning of upgradation of slums can prove more beneficial instead of the regular approach of just providing the bare minimum. This is true for both relocation and upgradation of slums, since slum is a place where different activities take place just in a compact and irregular manner (Cantada, 2015). Through studies of slum upgradation in different countries, the main strategies and approaches towards the upgradation remains similar and the only difference being the degree of execution by the officials and others involved. The desires and needs of stakeholders anywhere in the world remain ignored and the only solution to which is their inclusion. The other aspect which is taken care of in the successful projects is the future of the slums which are going undergoing upgradation and the ones which may emerge because of any possible reason. The projects may or not may not be successful if this is forgotten based on the scale of the project (Panday, 2020). From these studies we understood that there are many possibilities depending on the issues addressed and people's opinions. Moving forward, we would like to understand this into further detail by talking to individuals in the slum areas.

Study Details

The focus of the paper would lie in studying and understanding how the underprivileged people in our city/society would like their houses to look like and how it would have an impact on the overall look of the city. The interviews were conducted with the intention of understanding the different aspects of the habitable spaces of people currently residing in the underprivileged housing sector. The daily background information, their struggles in daily life, their requirements, their opportunities, availability of resources and their

aspirations are some of the data that was recorded through the interviews. Different parts in the Bangalore City have been seeing a rapid growth in different sectors and all this growth is majorly supported through infrastructure and therefore a lot of construction and other activities that support the growth of the city are taking place. This has been a major opportunity for the people who are looking for income sources and therefore are attracted towards the city. The people failing to find accommodation at affordable prices has led to an increase in the number of unofficial dwellings in the city. These further expand into slums and then keep expanding at an uncontrollable rate. Since they are unofficial, the living conditions of the residents are compromised. The interviews were therefore conducted to understand these in detail. The interviews were initially conducted in a slum settlement that is in parking lot of REVA University, Kattigenahalli, Bangalore on 21st and 22nd May 2022. The slum accommodates approximately 300 residents covering all age groups. After the initial studying of the slum in Kattigenahalli and getting an idea of how to approach people and having a basic idea of the problems of the people, the study was further expanded to the entirety of Bangalore and interviews were conducted in slums in different parts of Bangalore to better understand the situation that is being faced by the people. The second round of interviews was done throughout the month of September 2022 on weekends so that maximum number of the residents were available for the interview. The data collection was done through various means, one-to-one interviews where the residents answered the questionnaire and additional feedbacks were recorded, others were done through regular interactions and questions being mixed into these regular conversations. At certain points, a topic was floated to a group that was having a conversation and their views were recorded through that. The most creative responses were recorded through sketches done by kids residing in the various slums, who portrayed their ideas through colors and graphics. During the interviews, the participation of women from all sorts of age group was restricted and only a few were willing to cooperate for the interviews.

Observations and Findings

Background information of interviewees:

The residents in the slums were from different parts of the state and country. Most of the residents belonged to Karnataka itself, the others were from Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and a few from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The major reason for people migrating to Bangalore was to earn a living but the reasons they left hometowns varied. Most of them were farmers who couldn't earn enough due to insufficient rain or crop failures, a certain group of residents were street and theatrical performers and lost their livelihood to emerging movie industry, a certain group was moved by lights and lifestyle of Bangalore and decided the city as their base, there were also residents who came to earn a little extra from what they were earning and provide a better future to their family. The size of the families varied based on various factors. Some of them had family of 7 to 8 people which had all the generations living together whereas some just had their nuclear family with them. There was also a set of people who lived alone, and their families lived in different part of the city or state to earn a little more. The occupations also varied based on the approach of the people towards their life and desires. Most of them were daily wage workers and were under contractor to get the daily work. Some of them were employed by contractors and would go for construction or masonry work. Some of the female residents would work as cleaners for

BBMP and the others worked as house maids at various residences in the nearest locality. The others are self-employed in jobs such as cab drivers, water tanker distributors and various other fields.

What are the services which are currently available?

When asked about the facilities they currently have, most of them had electric supply in their houses and water tanker would provide them with water twice a day. The toilets and similar facilities were located a little further away and were not at all to standard living conditions. Most of the residents had two-wheeler for transportation and were self-sufficient in that regards. Most of the kids go to the nearby government primary schools, but the higher education would most often be a problem since most of them were located further away from their settlements and transportation would be an unnecessary expense according to them.

What are the different (and the number of) rooms/spaces you would like in your house?

The families in the slums were mostly nuclear, therefore when asked this question responded with a small living space, a bedroom, place for cooking, small space for kids to study, a washroom and a multi-utility space. A few answers included guest entertaining space which could either be indoor or outdoor.

What are the aspirations you have regarding your house?

When asked about the aspirations about the house they would like for themselves, initially the answers were only description of the basic requirements and amenities that were missing in their lives. These included extra living space, segregated spaces, and washroom areas to be included in their houses.

Upon further discussions and ideations, people started coming up with various creative spaces they would like as a part of their house. One such instance includes a large living room which would be able to serve as a place for gathering of the entire slum and various entertainment spaces to entertain them. Other suggested a space in which he could keep memorable pieces related to favorite superstars and actors. There was an idea of a house which could expand and accommodate more family members in the same plot area and then would again go back to the same size when the requirement was over. The other creative ideas were more of fantasy style interior spaces which would have different types lighting and would light up automatically whenever required, automatic doors and windows and large bedrooms with a view of the night sky.

The realistic answers included individual houses with sufficient spaces and segregated spaces for each individual person. They also emphasized on the need of better sanitary services since they were very concerned for the upbringing of the future generation.

How would you want the spaces in front of your house to look like?

The discussion about the spaces right in front of their houses was again more oriented towards the current lifestyle they have had. Most of them wanted seating spaces, gardens, and a small area where they could grow vegetables. The ideas of seating spaces were again interesting thing to learn about, some wanted creative seating in terms of style whereas some wanted seating to be made somehow on the ground itself. The senior citizens present wanted a place where they could sit and get up without spending a lot of energy and would be comfortable enough for extended period. One of the spaces required was the storage space for small farm produce they might have. The public

spaces discussion was very eventful but was only limited to spaces like government school, parks, hospitals, etc.

Would you like to move outside the slum? If yes, what kind of housing would you prefer?

The next question asked was in regard to whether they would like to move out of the slum and shift to place with better facilities and house, almost all of them agreed for this but with a condition being that the entire community moving out together. One exception being an individual who was very content with the lifestyle he had until now and was completely willing to continue living the same way. Another question which was raised was whether the residents would like to move into the apartment style housing community or individual plot style community, the answer was very inclined towards plot style community housing. After everything was discussed regarding all these aspects, the problems which could be solved in their current living conditions was addressed. These included providing regular water and electricity, LPG instead of firewood and better sanitary facilities. The others pointed out lack of height in their interior spaces.

Lastly, what are the government policies which you are currently aware of and using to your benefit? The last question which was asked was about the government schemes and policies they were aware about and were using. To this, most answered that they were completely unaware of them and were not using any of those. The only exceptions were people who have lived in many different spaces and then shifted to this area, and the policies they were mostly aware of were PMAY and Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana and were taking advantage of the same.



Figure 1: Sketches done by residents when asked for their aspirations in regard to their houses. These sketches include interiors, services required, different spaces, appliances, etc.



Figure 2: The sketches also had the exterior views which they have desired from their house, also containing the spaces and services they want around their house.

Analysis

The living condition of the people are not very great, and people are just managing each passing day. The spaces required by people are very basic and small due to the daily lives they've had until now. The people needed an inspiration from some other examples to generate their own ideas, but a lot of creative responses were noted once they came front. These answers would further help us come up with various strategies.

Table 1: Comparison Study

	Literature Study	Interview Data	Inferences (If Any)
1. Residents of the slum	Mostly locals who come together based on occupation and build a community together.	The residents may come from any occupation and the people residing have various backgrounds.	A settlement could be either occupation oriented or resource oriented depending on the location of the settlement.
2. Daily problems faced by the people.	Sanitary issues, availability of electricity, water and cooking fuel. Availability of space and height.	Same as Literature Study.	Various solutions could be provided by implementing the government schemes and design implementations.
3. Indoor Requirements.	Need for more space and other services.	Need for more multi-functional spaces rather than well-defined zones.	An organic design which would cater to the spaces that are required by the users and can be used more organically.

4. Outdoor requirements.	More interactive spaces, sitting spaces to have door-to-door conversations, area to carry out occupation related activities.	Interactive spaces, kids playing areas, conversation nodes.	The life of people in such settlements is more based on daily interactions rather than indoor activities and therefore outdoor spaces need to be taken care of.
5. Additional Requirements.	More storage spaces and places for occupational activities	Spaces for inviting guests, flexible spaces.	

Based on the interviews and the data collected from the people and guidelines given from the government, a simple single unit was designed, and people's reviews were collected so that an adequate design could be formulated (All measurements are in mm).

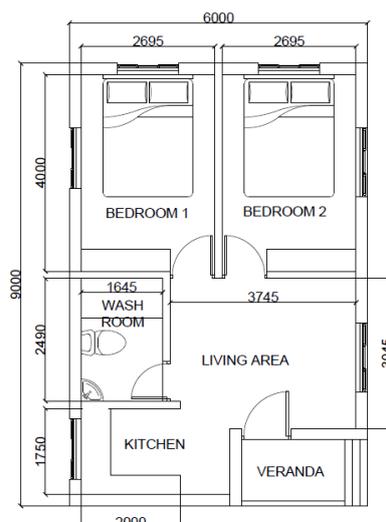


Table 2: Reviews based on people's suggestions and concerns on the basic model.

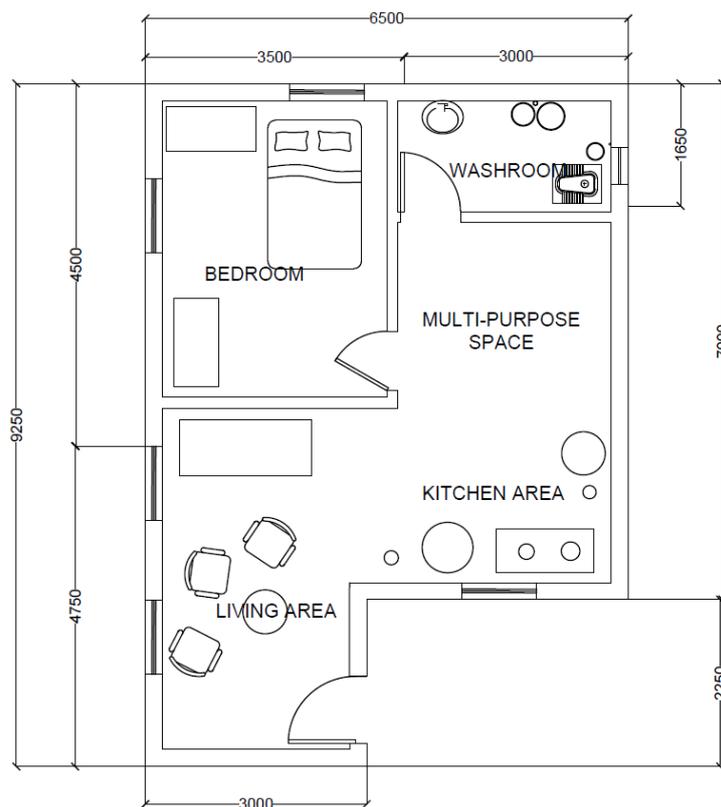
Spaces	Preliminary Design	Reviews
1. Bedroom Spaces	Spaces for 2 bedrooms with queen size bed and side table provided.	One dedicated bedroom sufficient and other can be used for some other space.
2. Living Area	An area dedicated for sitting and entertaining guests.	The area could be used for more functionalities and have no set furniture layout.
3. Kitchen	The kitchen is connected to the living space and is easily accessible.	The kitchen space is more than required and needs to be further inside for more privacy of the women.
4. Multi-functional Spaces	No such spaces provided	Need more spaces which can be used for various purposes.
5. Bathroom	Located in an area where it is easily accessible.	To be located further interior of the house.
6. Outdoor Seating	Small interactive area provided	More outdoor area to be provided.
7. Community Area	Providing large community spaces can be a little difficult using this design.	A different layout which can create more community spaces is required.

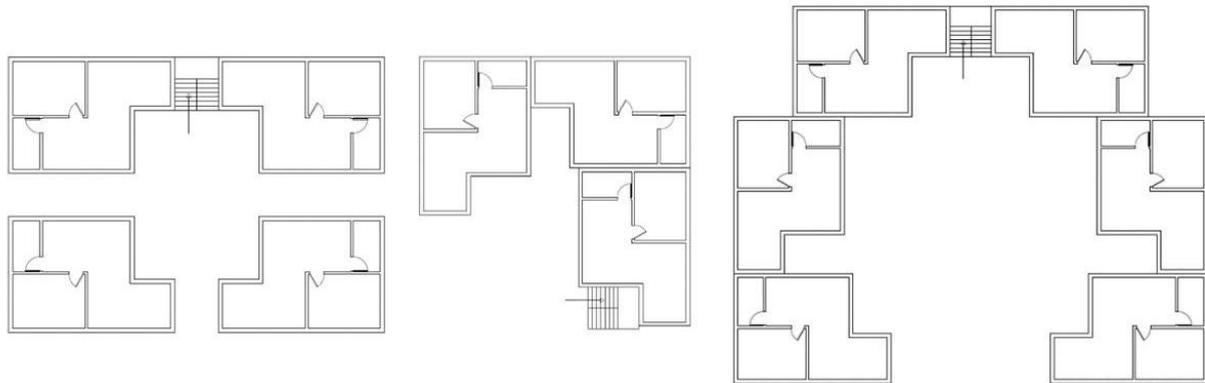
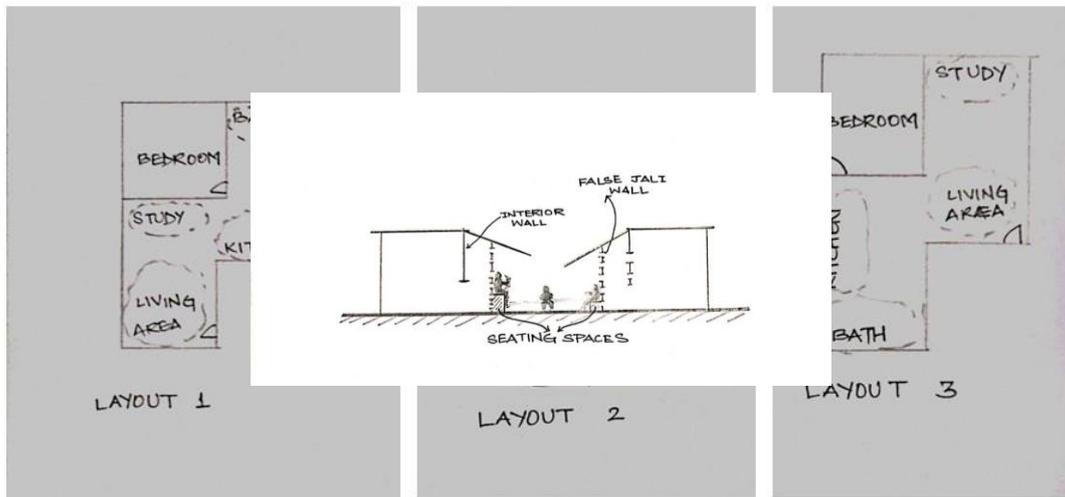
Based on the above reviews, the following design is proposed which is according to the government guidelines and can be implemented under the various schemes proposed by the government.

Table 3: Available and Required Areas.

Area / Space	Currently Available Area (m ²) [Remarks]	Proposed Area (m ²)
Living Room	0-6 [Usually no space or small furniture layout as living area].	6-7 [Dedicated space can be provided].
Bedroom	4-5 [The area for the sleeping is usually just the mattress or bed laid out].	12 [With provision for storage or other furniture].
Kitchen	0 [Most of the slums have cooking area outside their houses due to the smoke from the firewood].	3-4 [Based on the utensil layout and quantity].
Washroom	0 [Common washroom or bathing areas were provided for a settlement in most cases].	5
Study Area for kids	0	3-4 [based on the furniture available].
Outdoor Area	3-4 [Accommodated the kitchen and sitting area]	15-20% of One Proposed Unit
Multipurpose space	0	Depending on the furniture layout of the space
Total area of the house	15-18	Around 40

*Note: The total area of the new house is accumulation of the other spaces and the appropriate circulation spaces and therefore is much more than the current space the residents have.



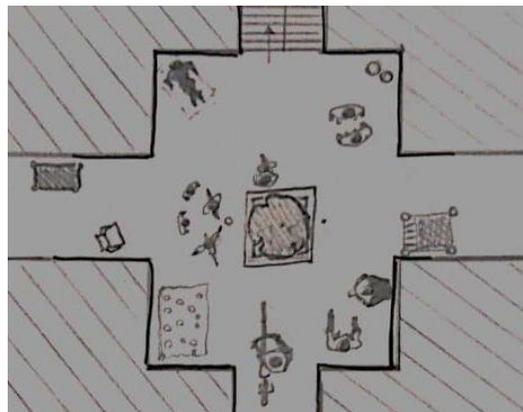


*Note: The interior layout is suggestive and can easily be moderated to account for the changes that are there according to the family. The location of the entrance door is subjective to the location of the unit in the proposed layouts (All measurements are in mm).

The arrangement of the unit in proposed manner gives common area for the residents and helps promote the interaction which is one of the characteristics of the spaces required by the residents in the slums. The layout also suggests vertical expansion where more number of units are required.

Conclusion

The slums in the city have continuously been a topic of interest and has vigorously been debated on for quite a while. Even though these debates have been for the welfare of the people residing in the slums, their involvement in the process has been minimum throughout the history, which has led to unsuccessful schemes and re-emergence of slums at different levels. This can be easily avoided by including the actual stakeholder in this scenario and come with solutions which are easy for them to adjust to. The reality check would be that when these stakeholders are included in the design consideration, various possibilities emerge and a settlement with a character could be developed.



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