SAFE AND INCLUSIVE CITIES

POVERTY, INEQUALITY AND VIOLENCE IN INDIAN CITIES: TOWARDS INCLUSIVE POLICIES AND PLANNING

Crimes such as thefts, robberies and burglaries have been widespread at the Vatva resettlement sites, a group of seven public housing sites where thousands of households displaced by various urban development projects have been resettled since 2010. These sites comprise of 9,200 flats, which is almost half of the total housing built by Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) under Basic Services to the Urban Poor (BSUP), a programme of the Government of India’s Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JnNURM) (see Map 1).

By 2014, over 4,000 households were living at three of Vatva’s BSUP sites. During the 2-4 years that they have lived here, thefts of private property and common property have been widespread in public spaces. Petrol from bikes, tyres of rickshaws and bikes, and cycles have been stolen. Lids of overhead water tanks, pipes covering electric wires, and water pipes have been stolen from buildings. Many residents have been robbed while moving in and around the sites. This has included robbing at knife-point. Many house burglaries have taken place and cash, jewelry, mobile phones and other items have been stolen. Residents try not to leave their house unoccupied for long and avoid going out alone after dark, fearing robbery.

This policy brief traces the linkages of thefts, robberies and burglaries to four dimensions of urban planning and governance.

AHMEDABAD POLICY BRIEF 3

VATWA RESETTLEMENT SITES
Thefts, Robberies and Burglaries

“Poverty, Inequality and Violence in Indian Cities: Towards Inclusive Policies and Planning,” a three-year research project (2013-16) undertaken by Centre for Urban Equity (CUE), CEPT University in Ahmedabad and Guwahati, and Institute for Human Development in Delhi and Patna, is funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada and Department of International Development (DFID), UK, under the global programme Safe and Inclusive Cities (SAIC). The research analyzes the pathways through which exclusionary urban planning and governance leads to different types of violence on the poor and by the poor in Indian cities.

The CUE research takes an expansive approach to violence, examining structural or indirect violence (material deprivation, inequality, exclusion), direct violence (direct infliction of physical or psychological harm), overt conflict and its links to violence and different types of crime. We note that not all types of violence are considered as crime (for example, violence by the state), and not all types of crime are considered as violence (for example, theft).

In Ahmedabad, the largest city of Gujarat state, the research focuses on two poor localities: Bombay Hotel, an informal commercial subdivision located on the city’s southern periphery and inhabited by Muslims, and the public housing sites at Vatva on the city’s south-eastern periphery used for resettling slum dwellers displaced by urban projects.

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Three FGD participants were victims of house burglaries and one participant knew someone whose house was burgled. One participant’s family had lost two cycles to theft. Cash was repeatedly stolen by two 14-15 year old boys from the cash-box of an interviewee’s tempo. One interviewee’s gas cylinder was stolen from outside her shop.

Men who had been resettled from Banasnagar (Dari Limda) and many riverfront localities explained that at their previous location they could safely step out alone even in the middle of the night whereas they do not do this here. While some residents feel that such incidents have decreased as the area has become more populated, many incidents continue to take place. What are the planning and governance related reasons for this?

1. MOBILITY, STRESSED LIVELIHOODS AND PATHWAYS TO THEFT
The approach to resettlement has resulted in constrained mobility and stressed livelihoods for a vast majority, leading to increased socio-economic vulnerabilities (see Box 1). This has pushed some residents to resort to theft, robbery and burglary.

Due to constrained mobility, many young men hang about the locality idly and they develop gambling and drug habits, often resorting to theft, robbery or burglary to finance these habits. Stressed livelihoods have also led to negative impacts on the environment at home. Where both parents are struggling to earn a living, they are unable to give adequate attention to their children who stray into these habits.
"When there are no jobs, the youngsters get spoilt. They get into wrong activities. They do not have money for the transport fare... when a person goes hungry then he will steal, he will get into bad businesses."

"If [a child’s] mother is not at home the whole day and they are hungry then they might steal. If I leave my shop unattended just now and if a child who has not eaten since morning comes by, he might pick up something... Today he might pick up something costing Rs.5, tomorrow he will steal something more."

**Box 1: Resettlement, Constrained Mobility and Stressed Livelihoods (also see Policy Brief 1)**

The distant location of resettlement sites like Vatva entails high transport expenses to reach existing workplaces, leading many to drop out of work or work irregularly (i.e. work only when money is available to spend on transport). Others continue work by incurring high transport expenses.

The nature of work available nearby (industrial) is of a different type than what many of the displaced have done their entire lives (vending, domestic work, casual labour in construction or trade activities, etc) and also pays less for longer hours of labour. Nearby domestic work also pays less.

High transport costs must also be incurred to access public healthcare and the public distribution system (i.e. ration shops). There are also increased expenditures on basic services (especially electricity bills) and maintenance of infrastructure (especially on water and drainage infrastructures and building corridor lights).
2. BUILT ENVIRONMENT CREATING NEGATIVE OPPORTUNITIES

Inadequate infrastructure and services in and around the resettlement sites creates negative opportunities. The absence of adequate street lighting gives an impetus to thefts and robberies in public spaces. Residents identified the main cross-road and road between VGG Nagar and Sadbhavna Nagar as lacking good street-lighting, making robberies rampant. Inside the sites, absence of street lights in many common plots and irregularly functioning street lights in the internal lanes creates fears of robbery.

The main cross-road and road have scattered vendor-stalls and hence lack "eyes on the street," creating opportunities for robberies. There is a flyover at one end of this road where vendors have congregated and women, referring to it as bazaar, identified it as being a safer area. The cross-road referred to above also has vacant plots that further give a sense of insecurity. In essence, lack of street lights, activities and development on the main roads enhance the feeling of insecurity and possibility of theft.

The non-functional common lights in the building corridors provide opportunities for thefts and burglaries. These lights are not working in most buildings since the common electricity bills have not been paid due to both stressed livelihoods and social disruptions (See Policy Brief 2).
Land-use, transport nodes, vending and streetlighting around the Vatva resettlement sites.
3. SOCIAL DISRUPTIONS AND PATHWAYS TO THEFT

Profound social disruptions have occurred at the community level as a result of the resettlement allotment process (Box 2). This has led to a loss of moral authority that local leaders, elders and residents in general were able to exercise in many of the previous localities. This has led to a loss of internal informal social control, creating a mahal or environment in which youth in particular stray towards theft, gambling and drugs more easily.

Since many residents do not know who lives in their building, they are unable to distinguish between residents and outsiders, which facilitates burglaries. Even where people recognize other residents of their building, the lack of strong inter-personal bonds between them means that not many are keeping an active lookout to protect other residents’ houses and property kept in public spaces.

4. POOR GOVERNANCE OF SECURITY

Failure of the police to protect people and property is a contributor to thefts, robberies and burglaries. In mid-2014, a police chowky (outpost) was built at one corner of the cross-road between VGG Nagar and Sadbhavna Nagar. Before this, the police sometimes erected a makeshift chowky at Sadbhavna Nagar or did patrolling for a few days when a violent incident occurred here. For many months, the new chowky did not remain open 24-hours. Moreover, the police did not follow through on reported incidents, even when the culprit was caught. For example, residents caught a man who was trying to steal water pipes from a vacant building and handed him over to the police who released him after a few days. Residents also felt that there was police corruption. One interviewee who had lost cash in a burglary pointed out that if Rs.50,000 is stolen then one has to spend Rs.5,000 just to file a case, and even after payment there is no guarantee that the money will be recovered. The feeling that the police do not do anything to curb such crimes often results in residents taking it upon themselves to punish thieves by beating them mercilessly.

Stressed livelihoods and social disruptions due to the resettlement approach and process have also created a situation where it is hugely challenging to establish any kind of legitimate and effective formal governance structure (such as resident associations) which could play a role in fostering a more secure environment in and around the resettlement sites.

Police chowky at the main cross-roads was open for longer hours by the end of 2015, giving some security against thefts around this area.

Box 2: Allotment Process Creating Social Disruptions

One dimension of the problematic resettlement process implemented by AMC and the Sabarmati Riverfront Development Corporation Limited was that several riverfront neighbourhoods were grouped together and assigned a number of resettlement sites, following which a computerized allotment process was carried out which randomly allotted a flat to each displaced household in this large group in any building at any of these sites. Resettlement from each neighbourhood was also done in phases (since court rulings extended eligibility, i.e., the cut-off date, during the resettlement process), with different sites assigned to the same neighbourhood in different phases.

In the case of road-widening for BRTS, AMC sent residents from six affected neighbourhoods between Ambedkar Bridge and Shah Alam Toll Naka to a transit camp on the city’s periphery. 3-4 years later, treating them as a single group, they were allotted flats in two groups of buildings at two different sites in Vatwa through computerized allotment. AMC did the same to residents from two BRTS-affected neighbourhoods at Kankaria Lake.

This allotment process separated people from their extended family, neighbours and others they had developed relations with. It also brought people from different neighbourhoods together at the same site and in the same buildings.

People find it difficult to overcome these disruptions because of caste differences, livelihood struggles that leave little time and energy for getting to know new people, and high turnover of residents (many allottees have rented out their flats and returned to live in central city areas, flats left unallotted by AMC have been captured by middlemen and rented out, leading to the high turnover of tenants).
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Displacement should be minimized and development decisions made after thorough consideration of the displacement it would cause and the risks it would pose to the lives of these vulnerable groups.

- If displacement is unavoidable, resettlement should be nearby so that residents’ mobilities and livelihoods are not negatively impacted. Negative impacts lead to increased socio-economic vulnerabilities that can push people towards such crimes. Planning for resettlement should aim to preserve existing social networks and collective bonds. This is important for the continuity of internal forms of social control that are necessary for controlling the locality space and activities in it.

- Enhancing livelihoods as well as nurturing collective bonds are also essential for the success of community governance of services (which must be functional for built environments to be safe). Community governance of services also requires government authorities to be realistic in assessing residents’ economic capacities and accordingly plan for long-term governance.

- Provision of adequate and functioning infrastructures such as street lights by government authorities.

- Planning and design in and around public housing sites for enhancing public safety would involve paying attention to land-use, street-edges and street use, and location of public amenities as well as ensuring that they are accessible and functional.

- Accessible police services and effective and responsive policing that prioritizes the provision of security, particularly for the most vulnerable.

- Micro-planning and governance can transform certain unsafe places into safer places by reducing the negative opportunities. However, this may also simply displace crime to another space that provides negative opportunities. City-level planning to reduce inequalities over the long-term is therefore also essential.

Research Methods

- Locality mapping and community profiling
- Ethnography + ad-hoc conversations
- 11 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)
- 7 unstructured group discussions (GDs)
- 35 individual interviews (residents, local leaders, water operators)
- Total 51 men and 53 women participated in the FGDs, GDs and interviews.
- Interviews with political leaders & municipal officials