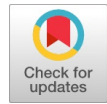


Accessible and Affordable Housing for Urban Migrant Workers: A Policy Perspective

Jaisuman K



Abstract: Migrant workers face hardships in accessing better living conditions such as housing, water supply, and sanitation facilities. This is highly prevalent among construction workers and other manual laborers working in the manufacturing and service sectors. They live in poor conditions and face the threat of displacement and eviction. These people are vulnerable to harassment, especially women laborers and their children who are often the victims of trafficking and begging. Migrants also bear harsh conditions like long working hours, the nature and toughness of the work, and are prone to injuries, without any medical benefit. They are neglected and isolated without any social security benefits. This paper aims to study the policy problem related to housing for migrant workers and the challenges in its governance. To this end, this paper analyzes the provisions related to migrant workers in the Urban Housing Policy 2007, National Urban Rental Housing Policy 2015, and social housing policies of different state governments and the various schemes supporting it. To this policy analysis, the paper builds on the appropriate governance arrangement that can build equitable, inclusive, and sustainable policies to address the issues of migrant workers.

Keywords: Migrant Workers, Migrant Housing, Social Housing, Urban Housing Policy, Urban Rental Housing Policy.

I. INTRODUCTION

The living conditions of migrant workers who sustain the Indian economy with their hard and tiring work have remained out of the purview of the government and other stakeholders for many years. Migration has always coexisted with population increase and it is expected to continue to do so in the future, resulting in exponentially rising urbanization [1][14][15][16]. When inter-state migration increases, the population and household growth increase resulting in stronger demand for housing in the urban areas [2]. Rising land prices in cities are forcing migrants and the poor to settle on marginal lands with relatively poor and limited infrastructure. The 'National Urban Housing and Habitat Policy 2007' suggested additional rental housing for urban migrants and specified some action points to the state governments and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs). In support of this, two schemes have been launched, 'Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Housing Mission' (JnNURM) and 'Rajiv Awas Yojana' (RAY) to increase the housing supply to low-income groups. The 'Draft National Urban Rental

Housing Policy 2015' specifically mentions rental housing to migrant workers to be constructed by state/local governments in collaboration with the private sector. The 'Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan' additionally implemented a plan to provide rental houses that are inexpensive for guest workers and disadvantaged people in the urban areas to give reasonable rental space to live under 'Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban' (PMAY-U). The scheme plans to deploy the existing collection of houses under the JnNURM to motivate public and private organizations to build quality houses for rent.

II. POLICY PROBLEM

There has been a poor supply of housing in terms of ownership and rental in the urban areas. The major issue is the provision of short-term accommodation to the migrant workers who stay for a limited period. The prevalence of slums in the cities over the years with congested infrastructure has been a concern for policymakers. According to the 'Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs' (MoHUA), India's housing scarcity was around 1.87 crore household units in 2012. This essentially means that 25% of the urban population is in urgent need of proper housing facilities. Add to this the various regulatory hurdles faced by the housing sector like floor space index, rent control regulations, and property taxes. Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), operating with a weak financial system are finding it tough to meet the housing demands due to the increasing migrant population. The housing policies of central and various state governments do not address the housing issue of migrants and there is no special attention addressing the housing and settlement issue of migrant workers. The issue of housing for migrant workers can be linked to the broader issue of informal settlements including slums. It is observed that there is an association between the urbanization and development of a city and the level of squatter settlements or shantytowns. In China, a decade ago, migrants were excluded from the urban housing schemes and were given accommodation in factory dormitories or shared rental houses by the employer. The Chinese government has an ambitious plan to include more people in the urban areas by opening the urban amenities to the migrant workers including healthcare and education services. It plans to increase urban infrastructure and renovate informal settlements using tax and credit policies. The nationwide lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected the migrant workers who lost their jobs and were unable to pay rent.

Manuscript received on 28 April 2022 | Revised Manuscript received on 07 May 2022 | Manuscript Accepted on 15 March 2023 | Manuscript published on 30 March 2023.

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The incapacity of the migrant workers to manage rent was one of the key reasons to move to their native during the lockdown, which was considered risky in terms of contracting and spreading the virus. A study on 'Migrant Workers' Access to Housing and Land' by 'Housing and Land Rights Network', identified that 62% of the migrant workers demand affordable and adequate housing options from the government in cities and their villages as well. They also identified that 31% highlighted the absence of secure housing and 16% complained of harassment by homeowners for non-payment of rent. This shows that there is a lack of strong social security and right to housing policies addressing the issues faced by migrant workers.

III. ANALYSIS

A. Present Governance Mechanism

The government of India and other state governments are supporting the migrants with schemes such as PMAY-U, Rental housing policy, working women's hostel, etc. PMAY-U is a centrally sponsored scheme implemented by the central housing ministry which supports migrants and Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) with housing facilities through private participation and credit-linked subsidies. The scheme is implemented through the states and urban local bodies. The predecessor of this scheme includes RAY for slum renovation and JnNURM which funded the municipalities. The central housing ministry has also launched the 'Affordable Rental Housing Complexes' (ARHCs), a project under the PMAY-U. This can help the migrant workers find inexpensive houses close to their workplaces. Housing being a state subject, various state governments have their schemes and programs to address the housing problem of migrants and slum dwellers. 'Odisha Land Rights to Slum Dwellers Act, 2017' aims to grant land rights to slum people with the security of land tenure and accessibility to decent housing. Rajasthan focused on creating low-cost and budget housing units through their housing board and Haryana has collaborated with private players to provide housing in prime locations of the city. Kerala government recently launched the 'AALAY - Guest Worker's Friendly Residence' project which helps the migrants to find a clean, comfortable, and safe lodging facility at a reasonable rent. Different state governments like Rajasthan and Odisha have started to focus on rental housing policies to safeguard the migrant workers from exorbitant rents charged by the owners. The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD) is actively funding the working women's hostel scheme which has been built in the cities as shared accommodation spaces for women migrants. A tiny number of hostels provide kitchen and daycare facilities. The School of Gender and Development Studies of the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) conducted an evaluation study and found that women hostels are safe, accessible, and affordable, and preferred by women migrants. The Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, 1979 (ISMW Act), which is subsumed in the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020, mentions accommodation to be provided by the contractor/employer. Under the unorganized workers' social security act, 2008, the central and state government can make schemes and rules

related to the housing of migrant workers. This act also provides for a social security board for unorganized workers at the national and state level to suggest appropriate schemes and guidelines for the welfare of unorganized workers. During the nationwide lockdown, the union government issued a notification to stay without rent for one month and the house owners were barred from demanding rent, violations were made punishable under the Disaster Management Act, 2005. Several state governments after the direction of respective High Courts prohibited evictions due to non-payment of rent.

B. Challenges in the Governance Mechanism

The Government of India has set an ambitious target of providing housing for all by 2022, but it seems impossible now due to the different progress levels of states, COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown, and a lack of social rental market to the migrants [3]. The lack of attention to the migrant workers in the different housing policies of the state governments proves that the migrants are always at the periphery of the government's vision. 'Tamil Nadu Affordable Urban Housing and Habitat Policy 2020' and the 'Maharashtra State New Housing Policy & Action Plan (Draft) 2015' mentions affordable housing social rental houses to the vulnerable sections of the population, but there is no specific mention of housing or rental accommodation to the migrant workers. The participation of the private in PMAY-U questions the role and ability of the government in meeting the housing needs of the migrants. Historically, there were conflicts and institutional challenges in the involvement of the private sector in housing schemes. There are certain issues like forced consent, fake allotment to beneficiaries, and consultation of the community which question the transparency of the private players. The multi-stakeholder approach in the Mumbai slum redevelopment project affected its implementation and the need and issues of the slum dwellers were not addressed [4]. The needs and priorities of migrants can be different and suitable to the local areas, and it needs to be specific to a state or city. Schemes like JnNURM and RAY could not address the need and aspirations of the urban poor households [5]. In certain circumstances, the newly given houses for migrants and the urban poor would be far away from their current location, making it impossible for them to relocate owing to their current employment and other facilities. In 'Rajiv Awas Yojana' (RAY), it was identified that the houses provided were in remote locations which affected the livelihood of the migrants. Scarcity of land has always been an issue in cities due to dense population and rapid urbanization [6]. These issues are further aggravated by land regulations and land acquisition by mafias and illegal encroachments, often with the supporting hand of politicians. Scattered settlements in the urban areas scarcity of marketable land parcels make it difficult to provide mass construction of housing facilities to the migrants. Financing affordable housing at the current price levels can be a challenge to the government and the involvement of the private sector makes it more challenging.



IV. CASE STUDY

A. Migrant Housing in Chongqing, China

China with its New Urbanization Plan started to treat migrants fairly with access to urban amenities including affordable housing, Chongqing city was the first to implement these reforms. The motive was to cover the migrants in the community settlements permanently in small towns and cities. The city planned to construct approximately 400 million square feet of public rental housing by 2013, which accounts for 670,000 houses approximately [7]. The entire project was to build only new houses and not based on renovation, totally under the authority of the government. The municipality of Chongqing had planned for an ambitious expansion of the community housing. They have supported rural-urban migration and aims to absorb 10 million migrants between 2011 and 2020.

By the end of 2013, Chongqing had opened the biggest community housing program in China and completed the 17th allotment of rental housing by 2016. It allows for a stable lease agreement, low and affordable rent suitable and specific to the area and the scheme of encouraging ownership in the housing system are advantageous to the migrants. They also provide incentives and better payments if the migrants sell their rural assets, in terms of exchange benefits in the urban area and other benefits like job training, school transfers, and social insurances. This will boost the urban growth and the local government can concentrate on improving and developing the city's periphery through these programmes.

Research shows the formal housing leads to better socio-economic outcomes and improves the dignity and stability of the migrants in the community at the city level [8][17][18]. Community rental housing has enhanced the preferences of the migrant workers to settle permanently in the cities because of the low cost compared to commercial housing. The preferences of the migrants to settle with their families and consider public housing as an accumulation of family wealth through ownership have also increased due to the low cost in comparison to commercial housing.

B. Aarusha Homes Rental Accommodation Scheme

Aarusha homes is a private company that has constructed hostels and dormitory facilities for migrant workers at a very low cost especially for people who migrate for a short period. They have different plans ranging between Rs. 1500-5000 per month and offer services like food, laundry, etc. based on the choice of package. First, it started operating in Hyderabad targeting the rural youth who migrated for work/education, now it is operating in Bengaluru and Pune targeting the rural migrants. Aarusha homes find potential landowners who can build rooms and lease out to them for a fixed period of between three to nine years [9]. Aarusha finds the plots/buildings near the workplace of the migrants, and it has de-risked its customer profile by operating in Metropolitan cities where the income of the migrant workers ranges between Rs. 6500-15000.

V. DISCUSSION

The 'Construction Workers Welfare Board' (CWWB) funds can be tapped and used for better facilities and to improve the quality of housing. The CWWB funds can be utilized to

provide affordable housing to migrant workers working in construction and related industries [10]. The state and local governments should identify informal settlements and upgrade infrastructure and provide formal services with the financial help of central government and through scheme-specific funds. Public hostel and dormitory facilities shall be established in all parts of the city, especially for women. The housing ministry can encourage voluntary NGOs willing to provide hostels to women who are employed in low-income jobs. The working group of the MoHUA recommended free ownership of housing in the cities to a minimum number of beneficiaries. This shall be provided to the disadvantaged and urban poor first, preferably to people who do not have any land or property at their native. This scheme can be implemented along the lines of the public rental housing scheme of the Chongqing municipality.

The next alternative could be the effective implementation of the PMAY-U which allows participation of the private sector in slum redevelopment. The emphasis on slum redevelopment could be better than slum up-gradation and have the potential to transform the lives of the poor. The dependency on the private sector does not reduce the role of the government as they must monitor the quality of housing provided and ensure the needs and aspirations of the urban poor are satisfied.

Housing and Land Rights Network [11] in their study on housing for migrants proposed some recommendations such as developing a comprehensive right to housing policy which includes social rental housing and hostel facilities, ensuring the surety of ownership over housing and land to all disadvantaged people in the urban areas. Further, they recommended strong social protection measures by the government for the migrants focusing on universal basic income to all and urban employment that is assured and legislated by the parliament, equivalent to the 'Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act' (MGNREGA). Recently, during the pandemic, the central government introduced the 'One Nation, One Ration Card scheme' universalizing the Public Distribution System that helps the migrant workers to get ration at their workplace.

We have the right to housing laws in some of the states, for example, 'Madhya Pradesh passed a housing guarantee law' in 2017 for low-income groups which provide land to landless migrants in the city for housing. In Punjab, 'Slum Dwellers (Proprietary Rights) Act 2020' and 'Land Rights to Slum Dwellers Act, 2017' in Odisha ensures the security of tenure over property and land. Matters of Land Rights and Tenure and Urban Development have been specified under the state list in the 7th schedule of the Indian Constitution. Every state shall pass legislation related to property and land rights to migrant workers, like Odisha and Madhya Pradesh. The Affordable Rental Housing Complexes, a sub-scheme under the PMAY-U is a positive development and shall be effectively implemented to ensure all the migrants get access to affordable housing all over the country.

Further, there is a need to study the migration pattern and a comprehensive rural development policy shall be prepared for developing rural areas and create sufficient employment which limits the migration to cities. As per the direction of the ‘Draft National Urban Rental Housing Policy 2015’, all the states, preferably states that receive a greater number of migrant workers shall come up with a ‘Social Rental Housing Policy’ addressing their housing needs. The policy can lead to schemes like Rent to Own, converting slums on Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) to build rental houses, and providing dormitories and hostels with the involvement of the private sector as recommended by the ‘Draft National Urban Rental Housing Policy 2015’. Recently, NITI Aayog has prepared a ‘draft National Migrant Labour Policy’ [12] which focuses on facilitating migration, increasing migrant workers’ wages, granting them special quotas and reservations, and creating a comprehensive central database of migrant workers to help employers and maximize the social security benefits. It further recommends education to migrant workers’ children and advises the central housing ministry to address the shelter and accommodation of migrant workers. This is a good start after the nation witnessed their suffering during the lockdown, and it can create an inclusive and compassionate society and build a competitive economy.

VI. CONCLUSION

The departure of migrant workers to their native during the COVID-19 pandemic and nationwide lockdown highlighted their living conditions and the vulnerable nature of their job. There could be several reasons for their exodus, but lack of assured housing in the city with basic facilities was the main motive. Addressing their issues needs stable policy measures and political commitment and providing budgetary support and scheme-specific funding to low-cost housing projects can cause long-term welfare [13]. As several states have already suitable legislation in place to address migrant workers’ issues, other states are also expected to follow suit after the mass exodus episode during the lockdown. Now, all the states shall prepare a social rental housing policy depending on the conditions and needs of the migrant workers. The central government’s measure to help the migrants during the lockdown does not mean their difficulties will go away. Migrant workers have remained in the periphery of the state’s vision, who have built all the necessities to live with comfort and convenience today. It is time for the government and other actors involved to envision a long-term policy that addresses their issues and ensures accessible and affordable living conditions.

DECLARATION STATEMENT

Funding	No, I did not receive.
Conflicts of Interest	No conflicts of interest to the best of my knowledge.
Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate	No, the article does not require ethical approval and consent to participate with evidence.
Availability of Data and Material	Not relevant.
Authors Contributions	I am only the sole author of the article.

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