

DELHI

Organising for Safe Livelihoods: Feasible Options

For many decades now, the prevailing wisdom has been to organise workers at the place of work. Industry in India, however has clearly moved away from the model of the large-scale organised production process. Labour associations have found it difficult to organise the insecure and distributed workforce. The movement among workers displaced by the relocation of industry in Delhi offers some alternatives to the traditional forms of organisation

DUNU ROY

The poor and lower middle class population of Delhi is under attack on several fronts. There is the steady erosion of working opportunities as public sector enterprises such as Delhi Transport Corporation and Delhi Vidyut Board are 'privatised' and 'corporatised' in the name of efficiency. There is the constant threat of eviction from 'illegal' homes and displacement to far-off 'resettlement' locations where work is not available. Not only are hard-earned possessions and investments lost in the process, but the new location requires larger investment to make it liveable. Currently, there is also the thrust towards closing down industries and transport modes in the cause of 'clean environment'. All this is actively underlined by articulate 'citizens', columnists, 'environmentalists', judges, architects, urban planners, administrators, 'welfare' associations from the well-off residential colonies, and other 'eminent persons'. The 'silent majority' is being vociferously mobilised to preserve its 'rich heritage'. Society is being 'structurally adjusted' to meet the needs of the 'global market'. What exactly is the nature of this 'adjustment', and what could be a strategy to meet its challenge?

There are about 140 lakh people in Delhi today. The Second Master Plan (1982-2001) had recognised in 1981 that, going by the prevailing rate of population growth, the urban population of Delhi by

2001 would be 144.26 lakh, to be 'controlled' at 128.10 lakh. The projected workforce in this was 49.08 lakh: with 30.5 per cent in service, 29.7 per cent in manufacturing, 21.8 per cent in trade and commerce, and 11.3 per cent in transport. Currently, it is estimated that roughly 60 per cent of the population may be living in subhuman conditions. There are 35 lakh people in the estimated 1,500 'unauthorised' colonies (UC), which are not entitled to any civic services. Another 30 lakh live in six lakh 'jhuggies' in over 1,200 'jhuggi' clusters (JJ), where the municipality is supposed to provide communal facilities. And more than 15 lakh live in the 'resettlement' colonies (RC), who are entitled to household sites and services.

Household data collected by Sajha Manch, an alliance of 40 organisations in the city, from 1,600 households in 13 such colonies yielded a revealing picture of the socio-economic profile of the population living in these settlements. The vast majority (over two-thirds) had small families, were young and educated, lived in sub-standard housing, depended on hand pumps and public latrines, and had to go to private doctors for treatment. While over one-third of the households reported more than one working member, the majority of workers were in service jobs and as daily wagers, earned less than Rs 2,000 per month, and travelled by foot or cycle. Less than one-fifth had electricity connections or gas cylinders for cooking.

The only significant differences between the three kinds of settlements were:

- UC had a higher percentage (42 per cent) of an additional person working inside the house, significantly lower unemployment (12 per cent), more factory workers (37 per cent), more skills (86 per cent), pucca houses (92 per cent) larger than 25 sq m (75 per cent), depended largely upon hand pumps (88 per cent), travelled over 10 km (56 per cent) by cycle (44 per cent), and were denied all facilities except schools (13 per cent).

- JJ had higher illiteracy (41 per cent) and lower skills (23 per cent), mainly working in services (35 per cent), with a higher percentage of daily wagers (35 per cent) and temporary workers (82 per cent), many (69 per cent) cycled or walked to work for less than 10 km (69 per cent), and the vast majority depended upon hand pumps (78 per cent) and public toilets (94 per cent).

- RC had comparatively more factory workers (23 per cent) with a high percentage of permanent workers (67 per cent), more people (79 per cent) earning less than Rs 2,000 pm travelled long distances (48 per cent) by bus (46 per cent), were favoured with tap water (90 per cent), and had significantly higher electricity connections (44 per cent).

Living Space

Housing shortage at the beginning of the Second Master Plan period (1981) had been estimated at about three lakh units which included (i) squatters and shelterless, (ii) families sharing houses in the congested built-up areas, (iii) houses requiring immediate replacement. So the planners estimated that 16.2 lakh new housing units would be required in the period 1981-2001 to house the expected total population of 24 lakh households. Of these houses, 43 per cent were to be built by the housing agency and cooperatives, 25 per cent would be constructed by individuals on site and service plots, and 17 per cent would be by individual families on individual plots. However, by 1999, only about seven lakh units (2.3 lakh by DDA) were actually built in 'legal' colonies. This has left a huge balance of 13 lakh officially shelterless families living in sub-standard housing.

What is to be done to ensure decent housing for this population? In an affidavit filed on its behalf in the Supreme Court, the slum and JJ department of the MCD has affirmed that, since 1990, the department

has adopted a three-pronged strategy to tackle the problems of JJ clusters:

(1) Environmental improvement in urban slums: wherein basic amenities such as water, toilets, bathrooms, drainage, pavements, dhalaos, basti vikas kendras, shishu vaticas, and community spaces are extended to the JJ clusters within a norm of Rs 800 per capita. The Delhi government provides necessary funds to the tune of Rs 20 crore for this purpose (adequate only for 50,000 jhuggies). What is not provided is equally important: primary schools, dispensaries, street lights, and peripheral infrastructural services like roads, transport, parks, workplaces, and hospitals. Furthermore, the slum department is now pursuing a process of 'privatisation' wherein the public amenities are given over to NGOs and private parties for maintenance and they are permitted to levy 'user charges'.

(2) In-situ upgradation: realignment of plots and widening of pavements, etc, is followed in those cases where the JJ clusters are likely to continue for the next 10 to 15 years, and where the landowning agency gives a 'no objection certificate' saying that the land is not required by it for that period. However, "due to reluctance on the part of the landowning agencies to issue such no objection certificate, this scheme is not progressing". Only in the first phase was in-situ upgradation work initiated for 4,800 squatter families at Shahbad Daultapur, but the second phase for 4,500 squatter families could not proceed because DDA did not give the NOC. However, in recent project proposals in-situ upgradation is predicted to have great potential for private builders who will be allowed to commercialise part of the land to 'recover costs'.

(3) Relocation of JJ clusters is resorted to where the landowning agencies want the land for project implementation "of public importance" and agree to contribute Rs 29,000 per jhuggi towards cost of relocation, with Rs 10,000 from the Delhi government, and Rs 7,000 'contribution' from the jhuggi dweller. Jhuggi families who have a ration card dated before 31.1.90 are provided with 18 sqm of land with 7 sqm open space in the courtyard at group level. Families settled after January 1990 are given only 12½ sqm plots with a common group courtyard, and the landowning agency has to pay only Rs 20,000 for their relocation, the other amounts remaining the same. In 10 years since 1990, the department claims to have relocated 22,215

jhuggies from all over the city to distant sites far outside the urban area. The additional commissioner (slums) has claimed that over 30,000 jhuggies have already been relocated this year (2000), while money has been deposited by landowning agencies for the relocation of another 80,000 jhuggies.

The above strategies could be applied in principle to the UC also. As on 1994, MCD has reported the number of JJ clusters to be 1,080, occupying 968 hectares, and they were on various lands as follows: DDA (700), L and DO (76), railways (65), slum department (30), MCD (23), gram sabha (16), cantonment (11), NDMC (6) and others (153). As on 1993, the government reported the number of UC to be 1071, on 5320 hectares. Of these 509 were in the MCD area, and 392 were under DDA (116 could not be verified). The other break-up was 183 in the urban area, 461 in the urban extension area, and 373 in the rural area (54 could not be located). A high level committee has already recommended that a development charge of Rs 514 per sqm be levied from all UC to be regularised, while the union government has recently proposed an additional penalty and recovery of land costs.

Both JJ and UC are supposed to be in violation of the Master Plan and its Land Use provisions. This is what legitimises their proposed demolition and the relocation of the people to the periphery of the city. In an effort to check the validity of the argument, Hazards Centre acquired the lists of JJ and UC and plotted them on the digital map of Delhi. This overlay clearly indicated that while 72 per cent of the UC were located outside the urban area (mostly in the urban extension area), the percentage of UC in areas demarcated for residential use by DDA may be as high as 81 per cent. On the other hand, 98 per cent of the JJ were clearly within the urban area and, of these, roughly 42 per cent were on land earmarked for residential purposes while 47 per cent were located on institutional and industrial land.

(4) These figures clearly underline the fact that the working population has not been provided with shelter by the planners (see population data given above) and, hence, has had to settle on whatever land is available – much of it already earmarked for residential purposes anyway. The total area on which these settlements are presently established is a little over 6,000 hectares, as compared to the 20,000 hectares and 11,000 hectares set aside by DDA in the urban area and the urban extension area for residential purposes. DDA itself has changed the land use category of roughly 5,000 hectares from green areas in the eight years from 1990 to 1998. Hence, these figures give rise to the possibility of a fourth strategy – that of providing additional land wherever (or near) the settlements are located and upgrading the facilities. This could be called the in-situ land reform strategy. It is a strategy which supports the unparalleled 'private' initiative and entrepreneurship demonstrated by vast numbers of working people to build their own shelters without any 'subsidies' from government.

The estimated additional land and capital requirements for the four different strategies are given in the Table.

Work Environment

The First Master Plan of Delhi came into force in 1962. At that time there were about 17,000 industrial units, of which 8,000 were already existing in areas that were not considered suitable by the planners, or 'non-conforming' areas. So 23 industrial areas were proposed on 5,800 acres that were set aside for new industrial development as well as for accommodating these units. But, in spite of this provision, during the plan period of 20 years, only one site was actually developed (for flatted factories at Jhandewalan). By 1971 itself, it was becoming clear that the city was going to grow far beyond the conceptions of the planners. The total number of non-conforming industries then had increased to about 13,000.

Table

Strategy	Jhuggi Jhopri Clusters (6 lakh)		Unauthorised Colonies (7 lakh)	
	Land (ha)	Cost (Rs crore)	Land (ha)	Cost (Rs crore)
Environmental improvement	–	240	–	280
In situ upgradation	–	2340	–	1800***
Total relocation	1500	2760*	1750	4270
In situ land reform	500#	2500*	–	1800
		3600**		

Notes: # Slums are presently located on 968 hectares.

* At Rs 22 lakh per hectare land price (MCD rates)

** At Rs 250 lakhs per hectare land price (Rohini rates)

*** At Rs 514 per sq m development charge.

The Second Master Plan should have begun in 1982, was passed in 1986, but actually came into force in 1991 because of the intervention of the Asiad Games. It called for limiting the urban population by 'de-industrialisation'. 1,553 hectares were set aside for 16 new areas for light industries and 265 hectares for extensive industries in the urban extension area. But the plan had nothing substantive to offer for the estimated 24,000 non-conforming industrial units existing then. In fact, the plan document supported 'mixed land use' to "enable small entrepreneurs, professionals, artisans, mechanics, etc, to carry on their vocations in their homes without having to compete in the commercial land market", as also to "cut down unnecessary commuting to work centres". So, towards the end of this plan, in 1999, it was reported that the number of such industrial units had grown to 1,12,000. By 2000 the Delhi government was claiming that there were 1,21,000 units in non-conforming areas.

It is worth noting that the 'environmentalist' lawyer, MC Mehta, filed his petition in 1985, just after the planned chaos created by the Asiad Games. This petition could have logically focused on the violations of planning by the government itself, such as the refugee resettlement of the 50s, the select regularisation of non-conforming industries in the 60s and unauthorised colonies in the 70s, and the Asiad boom of the 80s. It could have discussed the deliberate non-provision of space for industries and workers in the 60s, the forced eviction of squatters (and the subsequent death of 1,500 of them in a cholera epidemic) in the 70s, and the massive growth in private vehicles in the 80s. Instead, this petition highlighted the existence of hazardous industries. It is also curious that the Supreme Court of India sat silently on this petition for 10 long years, from 1985 to 1995.

A category of 'hazardous' industries had been defined in 1961, and stipulations made for their removal from the city. Some may have even been moved out in 1976 because, when Jagmohan was awarded the Padma Bhushan in April 1977, the citation claimed he had done so. At that time, a survey revealed that there were only 82 water polluting units in the city. Curiously, the Second Master Plan initially suggested that 5,000 polluting units present then (1982) should be located within the Delhi Urban Area itself, but by 1991 it was proposing the removal of all hazardous units to the National Capital Region. In

1985, Mehta asked the Supreme Court for the removal of 1,300 polluting units. Ten years later, in 1995, the government was able to identify only 1,220 hazardous units. Nevertheless, the Central Pollution Control Board issued notices to 9,164 units to show cause why they should not be shifted from Delhi. 2,225 objections were filed to this notice and the Delhi Pollution Control Committee was forced to agree that only 171 units could be classified as hazardous. Again this list grew to 1,226 units, all were given notice, and 433 objections received. Finally, in 1996 the Supreme Court held 1,333 units to be hazardous and ordered them to be moved out of Delhi or closed. Later this list was expanded to include 2,245 polluting units.

What exactly is the status of industry in the city? The only reliable estimate seems to have been made during a household survey conducted in 1998 by the directorate of economics and statistics of the Delhi government (with the aid of 'unemployed' youth). This survey reported that there were 1,26,175 manufacturing and repair units in urban Delhi, of which 46,082 (36.5 per cent) existed before 1990, 95.4 per cent were self-financed, but only 20.9 per cent had been registered under any authority. Totally they employed 14,21,870 workers – giving an average of 11.3 workers per unit. These units were further categorised into own account enterprises (33,566 units or 26.6 per cent) and establishments (92,609 or 73.4 per cent). The former were family-run enterprises with 68,930 workers (2.1 workers per unit) while the latter hired labour and employed 13,52,940 workers (14.6 workers per unit). What is also notable is that 55.8 per cent of the own account enterprises had only one worker, while 35.9 per cent of the establishments employed less than six workers and 67.5 per cent employed less than 10 workers. 33.9 per cent of the own account enterprises did not use power and 23.6 per cent were owned by the lower castes, as compared to 15.3 per cent and 10.9 per cent respectively for the establishments. In other words, we have here a picture of vibrant 'private' enterprise.

Establishments were further sub-divided into the two categories of non-directory and directory, depending upon whether they employed less than six workers or more. 33,313 (26.4 per cent) establishments were non-directory while 59,296 (47.0 per cent) were classified as directory, with 1,11,525 and 12,41,415 workers respectively. In other words, while 87.3

per cent of the workers were employed in directory establishments, the units employing less than six workers constituted 53.0 per cent of the total. This difference in size is important to note because it is the larger units which would have adequate capital and market stability to be able to relocate, while at the same time being potential sources of pollution. On the other hand, the smaller units would generally be dependent upon the larger units, be owned by the "small entrepreneurs, professionals, artisans, mechanics, etc", mentioned in the Second Master Plan, encouraged to "carry on their vocations in their homes without having to compete in the commercial land market".

Relocation and Its Human Costs

What is interesting is that, in 1996, the court voluntarily shifted focus from hazardous units and set up a high powered committee to look into the matter of regularisation of industries in non-conforming areas. This committee received 43,045 applications for regularisation but was able to certify only 376 as eligible for this purpose. The others would, therefore, have to be relocated to conforming areas. The government of Delhi then invited applications for relocation and received 51,846 applications, of which 22,399 were short-listed by the Delhi State Industrial Development Corporation on the basis of advance payments received against Rs 11 lakh each for 100 sq m plots. It is worthwhile noting that this figure of 51,846 units is comparable to the financially more secure 59,296 Directory Establishments.

Almost 15,000 of these units are proposed to be relocated at Bawana where a new industrial area is to be developed, only for existing non-polluting industries, by a consortium of private corporations on 1,065 acres of land. The operation and maintenance of electricity supply, water supply, and effluent treatment plant is also proposed to be privatised. It should be remembered that non-conforming industry is not, by definition, polluting. In fact, only 14 per cent (about 7,000) of all the applying industries fall into categories identified as 'hazardous' by the Master Plan – which, of course, does not mean that they are necessarily polluting. Secondly, all plans for relocation are on paper. There has been no development on the site and no infrastructural facilities exist for industry, although it should be noted that 79 per cent

and 37 per cent of the applicants do not want industrial water and power supply respectively. Thirdly, at present the plans do not contain any provision for the housing and services of the estimated 1,38,000 workers and their families – or the ‘unplanned’ workforce which will construct the estate. There is only a ‘green’ plan for cycle paths along which the workers are supposed to commute.

The present Delhi administration has been given the almost impossible task of having to make up for 40 years of neglect in not providing appropriate industrial areas, and 40 years of encouraging private entrepreneurship. While the chief minister says that 15,000 acres of land are being acquired to relocate 90,000 units, the claim rests on shaky grounds. Apart from the slow pace of administrative action, there is the disinclination of small industry to be relocated, and also the opposition of farmers (in rural areas like Bawana) to having their land acquired and ‘polluted’. Consequently, the Delhi government (and some of the opposition politicians too) have suggested that 15 of the 37 non-conforming areas be ‘regularised’ as industrial areas since they have an industrial density greater than 70 per cent. This suggestion has been strongly opposed by the minister for urban development on the grounds that this ‘violates’ the Master Plan – even though, as has been noted above, the Master Plan has been ‘officially’ violated several times in the past.

Letter writers in the media have also come out forcefully in support of the stand of the minister. Most of the arguments are based on notions of ‘discipline’ and ‘enforcing the law’. A telephone poll reported in one of the ‘national’ newspapers claims that 51 per cent of the ‘citizens’ want the industrial units in the residential areas to be closed down. Another editorial declaims that this is not a case of “an insensitive Court seeking to reduce pollution, but administration turning a blind eye to illegality”. A third lead article states that “no urban planning system can give its residents economic opportunities as well as a liveable environment”. In this context it is instructive to recall the land rates specified by the Second Master Plan. The per square metre rates were Rs 140 for residential areas for the economically weaker sections, Rs 1,000 for public and semi-public lands, Rs 3,000 for industrial plots, and Rs 6,000 for commercial zones. Current development projects have hiked the last to Rs 16,000. Hence, it is evident that when

changes of land use have to be made, the ‘law’ will tilt towards that which is more ‘beneficial’ in financial terms. This also explains why the most expensive option of relocation is preferred to in-situ upgradation.

A recent estimate given by the minister of urban development (basis not known) is that Rs 5,000 crore is the annual price paid by Delhi (with two-thirds of the population suffering from respiratory problems) for environmental diseases caused by pollution (20 per cent is contributed by industry). Since 60 per cent of Delhi’s population belongs to the economically weaker sections, it can also be claimed that Rs 3,000 crore is the annual price paid by them for not being provided with a clean working environment. At the same time, if 50,000 units are relocated, then perhaps half the five lakh jobs (a very conservative estimate of 10 workers per unit) would be lost as industry seeks to mechanise/modernise to cut down on operational costs. This would entail an additional direct financial loss of Rs 600 crore per year. Of

the other half of jobs preserved, workers could lose as much as Rs 600 crore every year on transportation costs alone. If six lakh jhuggies are relocated, the working population stands to lose another estimated Rs 1,200 crore of capital invested in the previous habitation.

There are other ‘environmental’ costs that have not been estimated. For instance, there are severe costs of trauma in dislocation. The absence of private space to defecate or bathe, the lack of proper shelter in rain, winter, and summer, and the threat from animals, waterlogging, and other human beings, creates an enormous sense of insecurity, particularly for women. There are costs involved in death and paying for treatment of disease (for instance, the 1,200 lives lost to cholera in 1988 because of polluted drinking water drawn from handpumps in resettlement colonies). There are the social tensions that emerge in new settlements where plots are allotted by draw and neighbours have no social links. This has been made unimaginably worse by the present ‘imaginative’ design of a

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'common' courtyard which becomes a source of constant conflict.

The three strategies of closure or relocation or regularisation discussed above are based on the premise that industry has to be isolated from other human activities. This does not address the essential issue of controlling pollutants, because every relocated or regularised unit will continue to pollute wherever it is and affect the workers. Since both air and water pollution enter the ecosystem, they have long-term and long-range effects that become manifest over time and space and are not immediately visible. The above strategies also bypass the plight of the workers who are either thrown out of jobs or have to travel long distances to get to work (see data for RC given above). The additional distance puts a further stress on the infrastructure required for power, water supply, sewerage, waste disposal, and transportation and, in sum, adds to the pollution loads.

An alternative strategy could be premised on the notion that industry has to provide 'safe' livelihoods. In other words it has to protect both livelihoods as well as environment. This is the concept on which the 'garden towns' of the earlier industrial complexes were built. Furthermore, the strategy could take cognisance of the enormous 'private' energies that have gone into the development of the small-scale industrial units in Delhi. Learning from the experience of the 'mixed-use' industrial towns, the fundamental principles of occupational safety, the struggle of citizen groups to protect their environment, and the creativity of small household enterprises, the following operational guidelines may postulated:

- Apply the accepted principles of pollution prevention (as recognised under the Environment Protection Act) to convert polluting units into viable non-polluting ones, and shut down those that cannot be controlled with the accessible technology.

- Promote the mixed use of land (as accepted by the Second Master Plan), so that industry and residences and recreational and commercial areas coexist side by side and reduce the need for large infrastructural investments. 'Mixed use' does not mean 'unplanned' location but appropriate siting of interconnected uses.

- Make it mandatory, using existing zoning laws, for industrial owners and regulatory authorities to live in mixed-use industrial areas (just as proof of residence

is presently required for passports and bank accounts) so as to provide personal incentives to plan for pollution prevention measures.

- Form 'mohalla sabhas' of the total adult population (as opposed to the present ward committees) in local communities (including all workers and their families), in consonance with the provisions of both the 74th Amendment as well as the Master Plans, to encourage grass roots planning and decision-making.

- Provide professional inputs through competent agencies, in the manner of a technical mission or popular science movement, for the mohalla sabhas to be able to monitor their environment and levy penalties against those units that degrade the neighbourhood.

- Assert the right to work in a clean environment so that both livelihoods as well as environment are protected, as provided for in existing labour legislation and in Article 21 of the Constitution.

For many decades now, the prevailing wisdom has been to organise the workers

at the place of work. However, industry in India has clearly moved away from the model of the large-scale organised production process. It is well recognised that over half the value-added in production is contributed by the informal sector. Labour associations have found it difficult to organise the insecure and distributed workforce in this sector. This has made the multi-pronged attack on the workers and their families even more vicious as there is little or no sustained opposition. Hence, there is a need to look beyond traditional forms of organisation.

Organisation at the place of residence can provide a strong supplementary force to the strength of labour. It not only draws the worker's family into the larger social arena, it also provides the potential for sustaining the struggle for a better life not just a better job. Within the context of globalisation and privatisation as an answer to upper middle class aspirations, there is an emerging possibility of emphasising the right to safe livelihoods for workers in a democratic society. [27]