

SHORT NOTE ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL POLICY DOCUMENT ON THE 'NATIONAL URBAN HOUSING AND HABITAT POLICY, 2007'

By: Sonali Ladha

NALSAR, University of Law, Hyderabad,
sonali.ladha95@gmail.com

The National Urban Housing and Habitat Policy was introduced in 2007 to facilitate urban and rural housing by the Ministry of Housing & Urban Poverty Alleviation. Over the last 6-7 years of implementation of this policy, various reports published by the ministry shows significant changes in housing towards the aim established by the NUHHP 2007. However, along with the better, the policy has also left various loopholes in the policy. Through this short note the author seeks to on one hand, look into why the policy was initiated, how it aids urbanization and the various positive effects such as social mobility. Moreover, the submission will look at how the policy seeks for Foreign Direct Investment and Private Investments, leading to a wider gap between the rich and the poor. Thus, this short note analysis will show how though the policy has benefited the weaker sections, it still contains ill-effects to the society through a socio-legal perspective.

Introduction

The term "Urban" has various interpretations depending on different regions of the world. "Urban" in India is defined as a human settlement with a minimum population of 5,000 persons, with 75% of the male population engaged in non-agricultural activities and a population density of at least 400 persons per sq. km.[1] Further, all statutory towns having Municipal Corporation, Municipal Council or Nagar Panchayat as well as a Cantonment Board are classified as "Urban." [2] Urban Housing is the characteristic of living in such urban areas. The Ministry of Housing & Urban Poverty Alleviation introduced the National Urban Housing and Habitat Policy in 2007 to facilitate urban and rural housing. Over the last 6-7 years of implementation of this policy, various reports published by the ministry shows significant changes in housing towards the aim established by the NUHHP 2007.[3] However, along with the better, it has also brought to light the various loopholes in the policy. Thus, through this short note, the author will look into the

various positive effects in the sociological context and present the drawbacks in the policy.

Why the author chose this topic?

Housing and Habitat is one of humans' basic needs apart from water, food, clothing and air. Having a stable house provides primarily a roof over one's head to protect them from various external forces. It also provides stability and ensures better health, security, dignity and safety. In search of job opportunities, along with these amenities, people move from rural areas to urban areas creating slums. The inhuman condition of slums draws apathy. A total of 227 million people in the world have moved out of slum conditions since 2000.[4] In India, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation has recognized the need to work for the welfare of the weaker sections of the society which are usually prone to the situation of moving to urban areas without the security of a house and hence, end up in slums. Thus, they introduced various policies for ensuring housing in urban areas. Such policies include RAY, JNNURM, NUHHP, etc. These policies have enhanced the situation of urban housing and have changed society in innumerable ways. So, the author chose this theme to scrutinize the problems of urban housing in a sociological policy context. Out of the various policies enacted, the National Urban Housing and Habitat Policy provides details on why the act has been put into force along with specific aims which it wishes to reach. It not only looks into urban housing but also various aspects of rural housing. It also looks into other issues such as education, water supply, food, etc. and lays importance on sustainable development. It has shown much development along the years and keeps the interests of the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) and Low Income Groups (LIG) sectors primary. The Ministry of Urban Housing has invested the most in this policy, which is why the author has chosen to look into an unsettling problem in India, housing.

Research Methodology

The National Urban Housing and Habitat Policy is a detailed document divided into chapters relying on statistics wholly. It starts with the need for the policy which explains why the policy was introduced by showing the magnitude of the problem existing. It then explains the aims at a larger level with special provisional aims for the SC, ST, OBC, Minorities, Disabled and Women. In the next chapter it clarifies the

role of the central government which is deemed to execute actions in consultation with state governments. The policy then explains the specific areas of action and provides details through an action plan. The policy document ends with the ultimate goals of the plan which merely states that it aims to *ensure sustainable development for all urban human settlements, duly serviced by basic civic amenities for ensuring better quality of life for all urban citizens.*

Hence, the author firstly read carefully through the policy document and then went through other policies introduced under the same theme. Subsequently, the author looked into the various reports published which display the results of this policy.

Thus, through this short note the author will show how the policy document is firstly, beneficiary by showing why the policy was introduced, how it aids urbanization, how it leads to an increase in social mobility, the importance given to the environment and the implementation. Then the author will show the loopholes present in the document as though it seeks for Foreign Direct Investment and Private Investments, how that widens the gap between the rich and the poor causing sociological problems. Also, there are many questions unresolved in the policy such as the payment of taxes. So, this short note analysis will show how though the policy has benefitted the weaker sections, it still contains ill-effects to the society through a sociological perspective.

Analysis

The NUHHP 2007 has been very effective yet hazardous to the society at the same time. This section will look into the policy document closely and analyze the effects of it.

Why was the policy made?

The policy was made at the end of the 10th Five Year Plan as there were reports that the housing shortage estimated to be 24.7 million. It was found that 99% of the housing shortage pertains to the Economically Weaker Sections and Low Income Groups. In total 27% of the poor live in urban areas and the number of urban poor rose to 4.4 million people.[5] Moreover, due to the rural to urban shift of labor, the marginal workers increased by 360% and the wage employment was being progressively replaced by sub-contracting. To add to this, the urban

health and hygiene had started taking a toll due to the development of slums for these marginal workers. The situation was grave in places like Mumbai, where 55% of the population lived in slums. The policy recognized that with slum dwellers frequent episodes of illness, it is of vital importance that special attention is paid to urban health and hygiene and also the hygienic and spacious housing be supplemented with basic services and a congenial habitat for the improvement in the productivity of workers. With the magnitude of poverty rising to 80.7 million, the government felt the need to introduce a policy where urban housing would develop under the hood of sustainable development. It ensures equitable supply of land shelter. The policy reviewed the fact that 50% of India's population is forecasted to be living in urban areas by 2041. Moreover, it assures that the other sectors not be affected, for example it promises that prime agricultural areas would be provided with irrigation and the development happens at an optimum level. Thus, the core focus of this Policy was introduced as *'a provision of "Affordable Housing For All" with special emphasis on vulnerable sections of society such as Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes, Minorities and the urban poor.'*

Aids Urbanization and Social Mobility

The policy aids the rural to urban shift by providing housing facilities to people, primarily the weaker sections of the society such as the EWS and LIG groups. The NUHHP 2007 revolves around the various actions laid down to be performed in the betterment of these weaker sections. It provides spatial incentives such as *'relaxation of Floor Area Ratio (FAR) for ensuring that 20-25 % of the FAR are reserved for EWS / LIG and issuance of Transferable Development Rights (TDR) for clearance of transport bottlenecks in the inner-city areas and availability of additional FAR in Outer Zones will be promoted with a view to meeting the housing shortage amongst EWS/LIG.'* Also, it seeks to create a supportive urban environment by acting as *'an enabler and facilitator by developing suitable financial instruments for promotion of housing for the EWS and LIG groups serviced by basic amenities.'* It also tries to simplify housing finance by developing *'suitable fiscal concessions in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance for promotion of housing and urban infrastructure with special focus on EWS/LIG beneficiaries combined with a monitoring mechanism for effective targeting.'* Thus, it can be seen that the policy

seeks to facilitate the urban population by providing subsidies and amenities. Furthermore, the policy aims at employment generation by the *'upgradation of construction skills and accelerated development of housing and infrastructure sectors for giving an impetus to employment generation.'* Taking a closer look at the implementation of the policy, this has shown to have a positive effect over the years. The shift from rural to urban causes a vertical social mobility of the weaker sections as they move from the upward in status level to the status of an urban level. As given by Louis Wirth in *'Urbanism as a Way of Life'*[6], Urbanism is focused more on lifestyle rather than on structure. It should comprise of socially and culturally heterogeneous people. This is aided by an increase of population size by the rural to urban shift facilitated by this act. Wirth adds that this provides a room for diversity as a large number of people come together from different sections of the society. The increase in population density also invokes effects of large population size on social life such as the tendency to fall in the stereotype of the urban areas. The heterogeneity in population gives effect to social interaction among various personalities which results in breakdown of the rigidity of caste lines and interwoven class structures. There may be cultural assimilation or acculturation of the weaker sections of the society. Along with this, it also breaks the notion of women oppression due to the exposure given. This increases the social mobility led by the physical mobility. Thus, this policy induces the rural to urban shift which causes a breakdown of class structures and class lines. With the Indian society still carrying hints of class and caste discrimination, this mobilization is needed.

Aims at Sustainable Development

Though the policy aims at urban housing, it gives the environment primary importance. This can be seen through its emphasis on sustainable development.[7] The policy states that it will provide for a healthy environment by *'Developing cities/towns in a manner which promotes a healthy environment, encouraging use of renewable energy resources and ensuring effective solid waste management in collaboration with persons involved in recycling activities.'* Furthermore, it states that it plans to *'Promote appropriate ecological standards for protecting a healthy environment and providing a better quality of life in human settlements.'*

Through these action plans, the policy does justice to its higher aim of not only removing slums but also to the importance of cleanliness and living conditions. Sanitation enhances the quality of life, the quality of settlements and even increases job prospects. With the liberalist approach to the environment that humans have adopted over the years, this policy also adds to it. In an Urban sphere it is very important to have such provisions as the weaker sections of the society tend to be congested due financial constraints. Also the dependence on environment of the humans is very large and protection of it is much needed.

Working at State Level

The policy states that it aims to *'encourage State Governments, Urban local bodies, Development Authorities to periodically update their Master Plans and Zoning Plans which should, inter-alia adequately provide for housing and basic services for the urban poor.'* It also urges for state planning as it aims to *'Promoting balanced urban-rural planning by following the Regional Planning Approach, take the whole State/UT as a region, under the Town & Country Planning Acts in the States.'* This is assured later in the government plan by stating *'It will be the endeavor of the Central Government in collaboration with governments in States/UTs, Urban Local Bodies and other agencies to implement the aims of the National Urban Housing and Habitat Policy, 2007 through action-oriented initiatives at all levels of Government.'*

Through reports it can be seen that the states did create housing policies. For example Kerala created a housing policy in 2011,[8] Maharashtra also created a housing policy in 2011,[9] while Odisha introduced a *'Scheme for Affordable Urban Housing in Odisha, 2012.'*[10] Through this it can be seen that though the policies were not introduced immediately after the commencement of this policy, they were introduced 4 or 5 years later. These policies have deemed to be very beneficial for all sections as they provide cheap housing. On the other hand, reports show that this supply does not meet the demand of the society which was to be a measure of calculating the supply in the NUHHP 2007 policy. The need for proper and affordable housing is much more than the pace at which the state governments are working at. With millions still homeless and living in slum areas, an acceleration of the process is needed.

Effects of FDI/Private Investment

The NUHHP seeks to achieve its aims of urban housing through the help of Foreign Direct Investment and Private Investment along with government funds. The Policy '*seeks to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in areas like integrated development of housing and new township development.*' It also lays emphasis that '*Efforts should be made to encourage Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from Non Resident Indians (NRIs) and Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) in the housing and infrastructure sector.*' Though this may seem beneficial to the government at a larger look, a closer analysis shows the ill-effects this causes to the society.

Opening FDI and Private Investments open to the betterment of the weaker sections of the society may play as a rebound in the longer run. While focusing on the upliftment of the weaker groups (EWS AND LIC), the policy overlooks the fact that this widens the gap between the rich and the poor.[11] Those not under the power of the investors would become more oppressed under the other richer and benefitting sections of the society. Oscar Lewis also supports this perspective in his work "culture of poverty"[12], which suggested that the norms and behaviors of the poor can be distinguished as a subculture of larger society and characterized by a distinct way of life, including an a typical world view and low aspirations. This culture was said to perpetuate itself from generation to generation thus, creating a wider gap each time.[13] It later on becomes a question of the have-not have which decides whether one is rich or poor. This may lead to social isolation in weaker groups' overtime in urban areas, thus leading to a larger problem than what was initially aimed to curb.

Another problem with FDI and Private Investments is that this extinguishes the Floor Area Ratio and subsidies that could be provided to the weaker sections as the investors are capital driven. Without providing concessions and subsidies such a policy would fail to achieve its aim at providing affordable cheap housing to the weaker sections of the society from the rural strata. Thus, having FDI and Private Interest contribute to the government funds would have their capital interests supersede the aim of the policy to integrate the society on an urban level by creating a supportive environment and job opportunities. The isolation is a hinder to the NUHHP 2007 policy aims.

Apart from this, the policy remains silent on issues like taxes, subsidy rates, quality of housing, dates of review of the policy, and the support for the weaker sections of the society to not fall under the rich and dominant class in urban areas. Without definite laws and procedures laying out the same, it is easy for the judiciary to mingle in a power play and discriminate against certain sections of the society.

Conclusion

The National Urban Housing and Habitat Policy, 2007 was introduced with the aim to provide affordable housing for all sections of the society. Over the years, it can be seen that this has been implemented well. Apart from housing, it has also worked for the betterment of the society. It has provided housing as a facilitator for the rural to shift to urban areas without the drawback of slum congestion and problems. Due to the social mobility enhanced by this physical mobility, the weaker sections have enhanced their class identity with better job opportunities and living conditions. The Policy draws close attention to achieving its aim with environment friendly buildings and using sustainable development as an approach to its goals. The Policy also lays down a detailed action plan which specifically explains how the state governments should implement the policy. This plan has been executed in many areas over the past few years and other states also plan to join. Thus, the Policy has worked for the better. However, on the other hand the Policy may have a few drawbacks. It seeks to increase FDI AND Private Investments which in turn will bound to widen the rich and poor gap and also facilitate social isolation. It also remains silent on issues such as taxes and quality of housing which has been a debated aspect over the years. Hence, the National Urban Housing and Habitat Policy 2007 has definitely benefited many but a few changes in the policy terms could be ideal. Only after acknowledging the loopholes and modifying the existing policy can we achieve the dream of "Housing for All" by 2022.

[1] As given by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, Available at:

http://censusindia.gov.in/Data_Products/Library/Indian_perceptive_link/Census_Terms_link/censusterm.html

[2] As given in the National Urban Housing and Habitat Policy, 2007. Available at: <http://mhupa.gov.in/policies/duopa/HousingPolicy2007.pdf>

[3] Government of the United Progressive Alliance, Section 5.3, Available at: http://pmindia.gov.in/report_to_people/2012-2013/report_PMO_English.pdf

[4] UN Habitat, State of the World's Cities 2010/2011, Available at: <http://www.unhabitat.org/documents/SOWC10/R1.pdf>

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