



Concept Note

Shelter Security and Social Protection for the Urban Poor and the Migrants in Asia

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It is expected that the urban population will double between 2000 and 2030 in the developing countries of Asia and Africa. It is also expected that the many of the new urbanites will be poor. Their future, the future of cities in developing countries, the future of humanity itself, will depend very much on decisions made now in preparation for this growth (UNFPA 2007). An important aspect of this preparation for accelerated urbanization in the developing countries, our focus here being of Asia, is institutionalizing Social Protection Measures for all, in particular for the urban poor who would form the bulk of the new urbanites in these countries.

Within the urbanization process in developing countries, shelter access plays a major role in consolidating the position of the low income population in the urban areas. Shelter security means, legal security of land tenure, including legal protection against forced evictions; availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure; affordability; habitability; accessibility for disadvantaged groups; location, and cultural adequacy. Of all these dimensions, security of land tenure is the most basic of all, next only to food and water as per the various UN resolutions and national policy documents. However, it is this aspect that has been given the least importance, because the urban lands have many competing uses, particularly in the countries that are pursuing rapid economic growth policies.

Studies in countries with private land ownership have shown that the informal housing where the urban poor live, have different degrees of tenure security; from de facto tenure attained due to ownership complexities, legislation on land and governance and local political economies to a legal land title. On top of all, is the way citizenship rights are defined in a country that determines the land tenure status.

In the former socialist countries such as China and Vietnam, where the urban land is owned by the State, the question of access to housing is a problem more of the low income migrant population, also called floating population in China, than urban poor in general. Urban poor in Chinese cities also include the former employees of State Owned Enterprises that have been restructured and workers

laid off. Some of them continue to live in public housing, albeit with very poor conditions and basic facilities. The migrant labour have some form of housing access if they are working in an industry or with a construction firm. But, the many self-employed or those working in the private enterprises such as restaurants, etc., who live in urban villages on the city periphery, are prone to evictions at any time. Hence for these urban populations tenure security is extremely important. In all, whether the former socialist countries or the market economies in Asia, have security of tenure for the urban poor a major concern urban development concern.

There are many local efforts, by the governments and the NGOs to atleast reach de facto (in contrast to de jure) security of tenure to the urban poor. There are also governmental efforts, for example under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) in India, to create housing stock in the formal sector. The official efforts are often limited by the institutional barriers, such as question of urban citizenship, governance structures, etc.

Besides the urban poor already in the cities, expected high rate of urbanisation in South Asian countries, in particular in India, the issues of access of new migrants to secure housing is also an emerging question. Within the migrants, there are temporary migrants and seasonal migrants. Their access to secured housing remains a question that has not yet been adequately understood and integrated in the policy.

Lastly, in all countries in Asia, access to Social Protection measures are in any case limited. But, the access of the poor, because of lack of tenurial security and hence lack of an address are much more. For the new migrants, situation is further more tenuous.

The efforts made and the barriers faced to reach out to the urban poor would be discussed at this workshop. The discussions would be around four theme areas:

- i) security of land tenure and housing access
- ii) housing security and social protection
- iii) housing security of the migrants
- iv) migrants and social protection, focused on the issue of what mobility means for Social protection