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## Land struggles in Hyderabad

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## Abstract:

Hyderabad city has been acquiring national and international attention in the last one decade or so. Several sector-specific policies have been formulated viz., IT Policy, Tourism Policy, BT Policy etc., and later the SEZ Act, to facilitate changes in land use to favour the corporate sector. The mandatory floor space index (FSI) norms have been done away with through the government order no. 86 in 2006 to facilitate corporate real estate sector, which has replaced the smaller real estate players. Leave alone the poor, housing has been made unaffordable even to the salaried middle class. Hyderabad has been put on the course of neoliberal urbanism.

In recent years three broad trends have dominated the land sector in public policy in and around Hyderabad city. One, regularization of government lands occupied by the rich and upper middle classes either for building houses or for commercial establishments. Two, removal of the poor from their places of living, even if they have been living there for a long time, to make way for construction of commercial or office buildings. Third, large scale allocation of lands by the government to private companies for establishment of special economic zones, information technology parks, real estate ventures etc. and facilitate corporate land grabbing in a big way. This has also resulted in forcible takeover of lands from farmers around the city by the government as well as corporate real estate players. The government and some of its agencies have become land speculators by jacking up the prices and conducting land auctions.

About 15000 acres of land is estimated to have been given to the private companies around the city in the last few years. Simultaneously, land holding rights (pattas) of about 17000 people have been cancelled in the last four years since 2004, as per unofficial estimates. It should be noted that the scam linked to the Satyam Computer Services is basically a land scam. Most of the 6800 acres of land, that Ramalinga Raju of Satyam claimed to be in possession of Maytas Properties owned by his family as admitted in his resignation letter of 7 January 2009, is spread around Hyderabad city and held in the names of benami companies. On the other hand, about 80 families living in slums for nearly seven decades have been forcibly evicted by the state's machinery in the wee hours of 27 December 2009. This was to clear the site for construction of Congress Party headquarters in the state. The poor were relocated to the social housing units constructed by the government, 3 km away, but the new units did not have basic amenities in place and they were away from the sources of work to the poor. Effectively, livelihoods of hundreds of the poor were adversely affected. The government lands must be kept in public domain for future needs and slum redevelopment in-situ should be preferred to slum relocation wherever possible. The trend in Hyderabad indicates the opposite and is harmful to the public interest.