

The Invisible Poor Living in the Streets of Chennai: Challenges to Human Development

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The Basic Objective of Development

"To create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives."

Mahbub ul Haq; one of the pioneers of Human Development Paradigm.

Objective of the paper

- To understand how the poor
 - Pushed to live in invisibility
 - Denial of freedom
 - No right to live with dignity or pursue their capabilities.
 - Excluded from the mainstream development
 - Denial of human development concerns
 - Denied existence in the city space
 - Forced out of community activities
 - Denied of efforts to acquire knowledge, better nutrition and health services,
 - No secure livelihoods
 - No security against crime or physical violence.
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MAKING A HOME ON THE STREETS





**VYING FOR A LIVING SPACE:
FINDING SOME SLEEP ON A
PAVEMENT AFTER A TIRED
DAY**

**FINDING SHELTER IN THE
HUME PIPES**



About the Study

- Field based study (June 2003- July 2004)

 - 5 locations each in 5 different zones
 - For wider representation

 - Each settlement had at least 500 people
 - More than six months in the same location
 - **Chennai for Change**, Action Aid India survey
May 2003
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The study population

- People living on
 - Pavement/road sides
 - Park
 - Verandah of the shop
 - Bus stand
 - Outside temples/mosques/churches
 - Inside hume-pipes.
 - Temporary roof or slept in the open
 - Nomadic tribes and mentally ill excluded
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Study design and Methodology

- Design : Exploratory
 - Sampling:
 - Purposive sampling technique
 - 30 households from 5 different location
 - 150 head of the households participated
 - Methods: Both quantitative and qualitative
 - Tools of data collection
 - Semi structured interview for individuals
 - Key informant interviews
 - Narrative interview and in-depth interviews
 - Focus group discussions
 - Non participant observation techniques
 - Visual methods like notional mapping, photographs
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Misconceptions

Misconception :

- People who live on the streets are
 - Illegal encroachers
 - Eye sore in the urban area
 - Unproductive; like beggars
 - Criminals and anti-social elements

Reality : Those poor living on the streets were

- Rural migrants; largely dalits, landless laborers
 - Pushed out of villages by poor economic conditions
 - Work as informal laborers for survival
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Socio demographic characteristics

Gender

- 49% women, 48% men, 3% transsexuals

Age Group

- 84% in the productive age group of 17 to 48
- 8.7% between 49-58 years, 7.3% over 59 years

Education Status

- 61% were illiterate
- 39% had any formal education
 - But only 17% could read, write and sign

Caste

- 57% of the respondents belong to scheduled castes
 - 33% to the backward class
 - 5.3% belong to Schedule tribes
 - ~~1 person to an upper caste community~~
 - 4% were Muslims.
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The Transition: Rural Poor to Urban Poor:

- ❑ 33% were born brought up in city streets (parents and grand parents were migrants)
 - ❑ 70% migrated from the neighboring districts
 - Salem 19% and Thiruvannamalai 11%, neighboring districts in AP 8%.
 - ❑ Reasons for Migration
 - 82% moved because of poverty
 - ❑ Unreliable employment pattern in agriculture
 - ❑ Rising unemployment in agriculture
 - ❑ Lack of cultivable land
 - ❑ severe drought
 - ❑ Indebtedness
 - ❑ Few moved with spouse after marriage
 - ❑ Marital/family discord
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In the clutches of Informal Labour

Occupation before migration

- ❑ 21% relied on Agriculture.
- ❑ 11.3% engaged in Construction work
- ❑ 14% of women and 13% of men were not employed.

In the City

- ❑ 94% of them worked in unorganised sector which involved hard manual labour
 - ❑ Only 6% were non workers.
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Employment In the City

- 94% in unorganised sector / hard manual labour
 - 80% involved in casual labour
 - 6% did not work
 - 25.3% in construction sector
 - laying of roads, laying cables, repairing of sewage pipes etc on urban development projects
 - Some depend on menial jobs
 - Rag picking, sex work, scavenging etc.
 - Section in 'illegal activities'
 - illicit arrack peddling (0.7%), pick pocketing (1.3%), black ticket selling (2%) and sex work (5.3%) and charity seeking (6.7%)
 - None had employment guarantee
 - Most worked in unhealthy and hazardous conditions
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Meager income and debt traps

□ Income

- 53% earned between Rs.500 –Rs.1000 a month
- 22% of them earned between Rs.1001-1500 only
- 8% earned upto Rs.2000 per month.

□ Debt Traps

- 88% respondents lived in debts
- Inconsistent work and the meager earnings

□ No access to any formal financial institutions

□ 51% borrowed from pawn brokers

Dwelling in the Squalor of Urban Streets

- ❑ The Majority (82%) of the respondents were found to have settled on the pavements.
 - ❑ 14.3% opted to settle on the streets nearer to the place of work after they were evicted from 'illegal slum' settlements. About 2% of them had lived in rented houses before they moved to the streets.
 - ❑ Interestingly 3% of them have been allotted resettlement houses in the outskirts of the city
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- Majority (75.3%) of them has been living on the streets for several years, particularly at the same location
 - Household activities in open space
 - cooking, eating, washing, bathing, family gatherings, entertaining guests, studying, sleeping etc.
 - In extreme weather they spent the nights awake
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Access to Essential Facilities

- 94% used governments run public toilets
 - Paid a 'user fee' of Rs.2 every time
 - Only 64% utilized public bathrooms
 - 50% washed clothes paying Rs.5
 - Only 36% availed metro water
 - Private sellers; water for Rs. 2-5 per pot
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The Cycle of Poverty and Ill-Health

- ❑ The perilous working conditions and unhealthy living environments had effect on their health conditions.
- ❑ About 10% of the respondents suffered from physical and mental disabilities.
- ❑ Most frequent health problem they faced was fever, body ache, stomach ache and injury caused by accidents due to occupational hazard, some caused due to burns and violence.
- ❑ Every time they visited the private doctors they had to pay Rs.20 to Rs.40 only for the consultation charge, in addition they had to spend money to buy medicines.
- ❑ For serious and prolonged illnesses that need inpatient care usually sought admission in government hospitals.

Living on the Edge: Uncertain Settlements

- ❑ If the living condition of the poor is despicable, even the little they have is also under constant threat.
 - ❑ City officials launch anti-encroachment drive
 - Brutal evictions using Police force
 - Use lathi charge and abusive language to chase those who question and oppose
 - Threatened to arrest and impose huge fines
 - Use heavy machineries like bulldozers to demolish the belongings
 - The city corporation officials ignored any request for alternative space or compensation, and continued their eviction drive in the name of urban development.
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An account of a person who lived in Parry's corner for more than 30 years on the street

- "It is **almost three months** since our family as well as all the people in this area **had no proper sleep and food**. During the anti-encroachment drive the policemen were very harsh and they **broke all the utensils as well as the mud-stove** and ordered us to vacate. From then on **I could not cook food here because of the fear that they would attack us any time**. Spending money to buy food for the whole family from hotels is a costly affair. Every day I fear to light the stove. **Now a days, all of us do not even eat a single proper meal a day**. Why should this kind of trouble come to our life? **We have lost our sleep and we starve because of the problems that we face**. Don't we have an option to exist in this world? **I really do not know what is going to happen the next moment, because our life is under constant threat**. Why do they have to **humiliate us like this and torture our life?**"
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State Perceptions

- In spite of the problems faced by these poor City development projects failed to acknowledge . Continue to perceive as
 - a burden on the civic infrastructure in urban space and are excluded from the benefits of citizenship.
 - Under the Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board (TNSCB) proposed to create a Slum-free Chennai by 2013. which means removing all the urban poor to far away locations.
 - The only scheme for the most marginalized poor living in the streets in the city in India is the '**Scheme for Shelter and Sanitation facilities for Footpath dwellers** in Urban areas' not implemented in Chennai city.
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Status of relocation sites

- The relocation sites the Poor
 - Situated at least 30-40 Kms away –hamper the existing livelihood
 - Tenements are built on low lying areas that are classified as flood plain or catchments areas
 - Current sites: lack of basic amenities such as safe drinking water, adequate public transport facilities, government hospital facilities, adequate service for garbage clearance and child care facilities.
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CONCLUDING REMARKS

- *Every Human being should have the basic freedom of being able to meet bodily requirements such as the ability to avoid starvation and undernourishment or to escape preventable morbidity or premature mortality ... capability to participate in the life of the community, to join in public discussion, to participate in political decision making and even the elementary ability to appear in public without shame' (The Human Development Report -2000; pg:19)*
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- ❑ The State instead of alleviating poverty, targets the poor in the city to annihilate them
 - ❑ The poor living in the cities are physically, socially, economically, and politically are deprived of their basic rights
 - ❑ They have been socially excluded absolutely denied of freedom to develop their capabilities, expand their choices and prospects for a secure livelihood and sustenance
 - ❑ Legitimacy as citizens is denied preventing them from participating effectively in urban community activities
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A LITTLE BOY DOING HIS HOMEWORK, HOPING THAT ONE-DAY HE WOULD BREAK THE CYCLE OF POVERTY



THANK YOU
