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# Recent developments in plans for Dharavi and for the airport slums in Mumbai

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Sheela Patel is a founding member of SPARC, the Indian NGO set up in 1984 to explore ways of working in partnership with the urban poor, and that began work with the women pavement dwellers in Mumbai. From 1986 onwards, SPARC worked in partnership with the National Slum Dwellers Federation and with Mahila Milan. Sheela Patel also works with Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI), which is formed of federations of slum and shack dwellers from 22 nations and their support NGOs.

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This paper and three previous papers (in the October 2007, April 2008 and April 2009 issues of *Environment*

**ABSTRACT** This is the fourth in a series of papers chronicling the negotiations over plans to redevelop Dharavi, Mumbai's vast informal settlement. It also describes current plans to redevelop land beside Mumbai's international airport, where more than 85,000 households live on a 110-hectare (275 acres) site. In both these settlements, each with populations equivalent to a sizeable city, the government plans appear to be driven more by an intent to support commercial developments than to address the needs of their residents.

**KEYWORDS** airport slums / Dharavi / resettlement / slum upgrading / urban redevelopment

## I. DHARAVI

The struggle continues to prevent the top-down, developer-driven redevelopment of Dharavi and the airport slums in Mumbai. The government is now looking to support the development of one of the five sectors into which the settlement was divided in the original Dharavi Development Plan, which envisaged each sector being developed by private developers.<sup>(1)</sup> Since the plan was introduced in 2004, activists from Dharavi's residents' associations, community-based organizations and other civil society groups have sought to engage the authorities in dialogue to address its many critical deficiencies. There have been some successes – for instance, the setting up of an expert committee with civil society representation by the officer in charge; acceptance of the need for a comprehensive household survey; and discussions about a more decentralized community-driven upgrading.<sup>(2)</sup> The expert committee also recommended that the whole redevelopment should not take place at one time, and suggested using one sector to examine the issues that emerge and consider how to address and manage the difficulties and risks before all the other sectors are redeveloped. Intrinsic in that recommendation was the need to work with Dharavi's communities and explore redevelopment with community groups.

The indications are that one of the five sectors will be selected, but it is still unclear whether the state agency (the Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority – MHADA) will supervise and undertake this activity or whether the task will be given to a private developer. The government has selected Sector 5 in Dharavi, which is not the best one

to start with because it is far less densely settled than the other sectors. Therefore its development will not help develop the optimal ways to ensure that in the course of redevelopment everyone will be re-housed in appropriate accommodation, and provision will be made for the enterprises and livelihoods that are concentrated in the other sectors. The development plan for Sector 5 will include a high proportion of houses for sale to outsiders (and aimed at middle- and upper-income households), so it will be using land in Dharavi (which is already one of the densest settlements in the world) in ways that will contribute nothing to improving conditions and space for current residents.

Even following powerful demonstrations of resistance by the residents, the state government is still not talking with Dharavi's inhabitants. A committee of secretaries from different state government departments has been set up to advise the chief minister, and it has rejected the plan developed by the residents that had been presented to the committee of experts, who in turn had recommended this plan to the government. This alternative for incremental development divides Dharavi into 32 sectors or units based on boundaries that the residents feel define their neighbourhoods. It would work with the many local organizations in Dharavi; it would also seek to improve the infrastructure and services that the residents prioritize, and help them manage their lives and livelihoods during the redevelopment process. But the committee of state secretaries is again supporting the plan to get private developers to bid for the right to redevelop Dharavi. The uncertainty of what will happen next continues, while discussions concerning the state government taking on the redevelopment of one sector seem imminent.

## II. THE AIRPORT SLUMS IN MUMBAI

Around 85,000 households live on a 110-hectare (275 acres) site next to Mumbai's international airport, on land that belongs to the national airport authority. Since 1995, following the Slum Rehabilitation Act, these households have been caught in a paradoxical trap. The Act means that inhabitants cannot be evicted because they were there before the cut-off date specified by the Act (1 January 1995).<sup>(3)</sup> At the same time, their land cannot be developed because it belongs to central government. The private company that runs the airport (Mumbai International Airport Ltd.) wants all these households to be moved, not just those who restrict the expansion of the airport, because this would free up land that is very valuable commercially.

The airport company issued a tender for the rehabilitation of the airport slums ("rehabilitation" here meaning relocation and resettlement) and they awarded the contract to a real estate company that has no experience with this kind of resettlement, namely the Housing Development and Infrastructure Ltd. (HDIL). One of the requirements in the tender was that the successful bidder needed to have alternative land to re-house all the households and businesses that exist on the present site.

The slum communities who reside on this land have several concerns. First, they want clarity with regard to what the rehabilitation means for them. While there are at least 85,000 structures, at present there is

**and Urbanization) are in response to an invitation by the Editors to write a regular report on developments in Dharavi and other informal settlements in Mumbai.**

1. For more details, see Arputham, Jockin and Sheela Patel (2007), "An offer of partnership or a promise of conflict in Dharavi, Mumbai?", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 19, No 2, October, pages 501-508; also Arputham, Jockin and Sheela Patel (2008), "Plans for Dharavi: negotiating a reconciliation between a state-driven market redevelopment and residents' aspirations", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 20, No 1, April, pages 243-254.
2. See Patel, Sheela, Jockin Arputham, Sundar Burra and Katia Savchuk (2009), "Getting the information base for Dharavi's redevelopment", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 21, No 1, April, pages 241-252.

3. See Burra, Sundar (2005), "Towards a pro-poor slum upgrading framework in Mumbai, India", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 17, No 1, April, pages 67-88.

evidence of land and construction to re-house only 18,000 households. About 18,000 units three kilometres from the airport are close to completion, and these 10–13 storey blocks are being put forward to re-house the first group of airport slum dwellers who will be moved. But no plan or programme has been put forward that indicates what will happen to the other 60,000–70,000 households. This would mean that while the airport authority's most urgent land needs will ensure that the first 18,000 households are relocated to a reasonably acceptable site, others will not know what is planned for them before the relocation begins. This is not acceptable to them, and the tender had asked for a clear identification of all land sites to be used in the rehabilitation.

There are five issues that need consideration. The first regards the use to which the cleared land will be put. This kind of resettlement is allowed when the land is needed for public purpose, but it seems that a large part of the land that will be cleared when the residents are moved will be given over to the developer to develop hotels and for other profitable uses. Under the law, only land for direct airport usage would be deemed as meeting a public purpose need. The second issue is the absence of any public agency to ensure that the government's rehabilitation policy is followed. The third is the question of whether all the residents need to be moved. Most would prefer to stay on their current site and upgrade their homes, and only part of the land their settlement covers is actually needed for the airport expansion; a high proportion of the residents also work at the airport. The fourth is the terms under which relocation happens for those who are moved – for instance, how much say do they have in where they move to (obviously this is critical for their incomes and livelihoods) and what kind of housing they get. There are also the cost implications of their new housing; it is common for households moved within “rehabilitation” programmes to struggle to afford utility bills and other charges. The final issue regards who gets re-housed. There is a range of ways in which public agencies or private companies can exclude inhabitants from the right to be re-housed – for instance by requiring documentation that many do not have, or insisting that only those who can prove that they lived there at a particular cut-off date (for instance 2000) will be re-housed.

### III. FINAL NOTE

In Dharavi and the airport slums, which between them house more than one million people, government plans seem far more designed to support commercial developments than address the needs of the residents. In both instances, the number of households and structures could make up a substantial city. Unlike more vulnerable groups, the residents of Dharavi and the airport slums are organized to a much greater degree. Despite the fact that these residents constitute large vote banks, their political representatives are not leading or supporting their claims for participation. Meanwhile, the concerns presented by the community leadership and others in the city are seen more as restraints that are delaying “progress” rather than as facilitating proper development with the involvement and participation of the residents.

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