SAFE AND INCLUSIVE CITIES

POVERTY, INEQUALITY AND VIOLENCE IN INDIAN CITIES: TOWARDS INCLUSIVE POLICIES AND PLANNING

As part of our research on Guwahati’s hill settlements, a total of six settlements were selected. Four settlements namely Seujnagar, Sanghmahuli, Teenug-Ganeshpur and Sripur in Lalmati-Behrabari hills and two settlements namely, Mithingapuri and Nawakata Shibodham in Gharghuli have been studied. These

and other settlements on hills developed as land in the plains is prohibitively expensive for migrants. Guwahati is a city of wetlands and

and hills, bound on the north by Brahmaputra river and in the south by

by Khasi-Garo hills. As a result, geographical constraints apply on

availability of land for the city to expand naturally. Migration to

the city from rest of Assam and other parts of the Northeast and

economic growth induced after the development of the new capital

at Dispur, Noonmati refinery and trade and commerce resulted in

demand for land for housing purposes, which was catered to by

middlemen encroaching the wetlands and agricultural lands and

then selling the plots to those willing to buy. Encroachment in the

local language is called dakhal. In and around the city, the tribes

historically held lands as common property resources, which were

either acquired by the state government considering these as state

property or tribes sold them to the middlemen informally. Since

there was no regulatory mechanism in place, ecological aspects

were not considered when these land transactions took place.

Tribals sold lands held by them and moved to city’s periphery and

up in the hills. Hill settlements have developed as those wanting to

buy land to construct their houses, migrants or landless tribals

found them on the hills.

“The price of land in the plains is too high for us. If we would have
capacity to buy a land in plains why would we come to live here
with so many hardships?”

“As we are tribes, we know that we have right to live on hills. We
do not need patta. It has been mentioned in the legislation. We are
khilangia manu (indigenous people) so we have right to live
anywhere in the Assam and northeast.”

About half the households in these six settlements were tribals (88
per cent of them Bodos by ethnicity), another 30 per cent
Assamese Hindus and the rest migrants from neighbouring states.
The households were low-income; about 72 per cent of them with
a monthly income of less than INR 10,000 in 2014. Three-fifths of
them had come to the city in last 15 years and one-eighth of them
were born in Guwahati city.
Some of the hill dwellers first arrived in the late 1980s and early 1990s when most of these hills were unoccupied. They did dakhal and made the ground ready for future settlers. Some early settlers continued to live on their ‘occupied’ lands, while others made money out of selling lands that they did dakhal on.

MULTIPLE DEPRIVATIONS:
Deprivation, by definition, is structural violence. Hill dwellers were found to be suffering from multiple deprivations which made them bitter towards the state government. They felt that the existing system had helped the affluent at their expense. Continuous deprivation had led to a feeling of discrimination felt by largely the tribal community, who thought they were indigenous people, but neglected by the state government after the elections were over.

For hill dwellers, there is nothing. No water, no school...nothing. We can say that we are citizens of India but we realize that we are not in the list of human beings. People, in any other country do not get discriminated like us. We feel this sorrow. See the deprivation the hill dwellers are suffering from. We cannot build it properly yet. No political leader or rich person made contribution for this temple. We are living in nostalgia and do not know about the future of our next generation."

Deprivations arising out of lack of secure tenure:
Fear of eviction: Hill dwellers lived in constant fear and trauma in the absence of tenure security. Women were most affected by the lack of tenure and constant fear of eviction. They told us that whenever there is a rumour of eviction, they are not able to continue with their normal lives. Children were not sent to school. Only the menfolk went to their workplaces.

Lack of improvement of housing, lack of services: Given the unresolved legal status of these settlements, the government had not provided water supply, sanitation or drainage facilities to the hill dwellers. The hill dwellers were also wary of investing on the construction of pucca houses or toilets due to the constant fear of eviction. As a result, they continued to live in poor conditions with little access to services that their counterparts in the plains had access to. The lack of secure tenure also excluded them from making use of government welfare schemes and programmes.

Inability to obtain various certificates leading to children denied government scholarships: Due to unclear status of their land and legal address, the dwellers could neither obtain permanent resident certificate or caste/tribe certificate. Without such certificates the hill dwellers could not obtain benefits due to the indigenous tribes. For example, their children could not get government scholarships. To obtain these certificates, then, the residents were forced to pay bribes.

Residents. Lack of sewerage systems also led to waste water collecting in open plots which caused foul smell. Households brewing liquor left foul-smelling waste water on the natural slopes that led to conflicts among the families brewing liquor and other residents. Waste thrown down by residents living on higher slopes ended up in the plots on the lower slopes creating conditions for conflict. In most cases, conflicts were resolved through the intervention of local Community Based Organisations (CBOs) like Unnayan Samitis.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:
# The GMC must extend basic services to these settlements, even if they are ‘illegal’ encroachments. There should be an agreement made with the dwellers that extension of these services did not mean legal rights to the land till the land tenure solution was found. Basic services should be provided after assessment of the local situation in each of the hill settlements.

# Local Unnayan Samitis should be given responsibility to manage these services in a fair way. The Unnayan Samitis should be recognised as local governance mechanisms and empowered to collect service charges on one hand and deal with the GMC on the other.

In Teenug Ganeshepur where the Jal Samiti’s neighbouring settlement provided water on a fixed monthly charge, the residents had a grouse that they had to pay irrespective of the erratic nature of water supply. The residents were unhappy with the Jal Samiti. The residents alleged that the Jal Samiti mismanaged the water supply system. Sometimes it did not pay electricity bills on time causing power cuts while on other occasions it did not get the motor repaired.

There were frequent conflicts between the individual households and the members of the Jal Samiti. Residents on the higher reaches of the hill did not take individual water connection due to lack of adequate pressure. They used community taps, where water was supplied for only 20 minutes a day. The shared water taps became venues for conflicting claims on water. Sometimes, these conflicts would get elevated to physical violence which would then have to be contained by other members of the community.

On the whole, in most of the settlements where the research was carried out, it was found that the lack of access to a dependable piped water supply led to deprivation which resulted in conflicts – verbal or physical – among the residents. Additionally, livelihoods – some of them not legal in the strict sense – also came under stress. People ended up paying a heavy price on the social front with strained relations resulting out of such conflicts. Others ended up missing work due to having to wait for water at odd times. Needless to say, women bore the brunt of such deprivations. Given the lack of water, compromises had to be made on hygiene resulting in costs on the health front – again imposing unnecessary economic costs on already impoverished settlers.

Sanitation and public health related conflicts:
Conflicts also arose in the use of shared toilets, where long queues formed in the morning owing to shortage of supply. Due to lack of sewerage systems, pit toilets were built which had a tendency to overflow during the monsoons, causing foul smell and conflicts among the dwellers, which resulted in sanitation related conflicts. Some of the dwellers were also alleged to absence from their occupation, which led to a myriad of difficulties. Some of the dwellers were also alleged to absence from their occupation, which led to a myriad of difficulties.
Paucity of affordable serviced land in Guwahati city

Unresolved historical land tenure issues in Assam

Deprivation due to lack of provision of services
- Inadequate access to potable water and sanitation

Deprivation due to lack of secure tenure
- Fear of eviction
- Lack of improvement of housing, services
- No access to credit
- No access to government scholarships

Deprivation due to poor accessibility
- Poor access to education
- Poor access to healthcare

Causes further deprivations

Education-related deprivation

Health-related deprivation

Water-related conflicts
Sanitation and public health related conflicts

Causes further deprivations

Diagram showing how various deprivations cause conflicts which lead to even more deprivations

Table 1: Sources of water and extent of deprivation in various hill settlements in Guwahati

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Settlement</th>
<th>Major sources of water</th>
<th>Extent of deprivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seujnagar</td>
<td>Group bore-wells, community nizra, ring wells, kutcha wells</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanghmaghuli</td>
<td>Household wells</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teenug Ganeshpur</td>
<td>Community water tank</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sripur</td>
<td>Household wells, community wells</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Community ring well, community nizra</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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No access to credit: In the absence of land patta, they were unable to seek credit/loans for any purpose. The hill dwellers had little access to formal banking institutions. Informal financial institutions were unwilling to risk lending to the hill dwellers as they had no property to mortgage as security. In effect, the hill dwellers had little chance to improve their lives by seeking more livelihood opportunities.

Deprivation due to lack of water supply provision:
Given the steep topography and low-density scattered nature of settlements, provision of piped water supply in Guwahati’s hill settlements is a challenge. The government has not provided these settlements with any water supply facilities as it considers them illegal. The residents of these settlements were left to their own devices as shown in table above. Since there are multiple conflicting claims to a limited resource and in the absence of any proper management measures, the residents suffered from deprivations of water, especially in the dry months of winter.

Those owning wells experienced comparatively lower deprivation. However, those dependent on community wells/sources or nizra (natural water stream), were very vulnerable. Those residing in the lower parts of the settlements were able to access groundwater through borewells, ring wells and kutcha wells, but, those residing higher on the hills were more susceptible to deprivation of water. Irregular supply of electricity and voltage fluctuations resulted in the motors that run the borewell getting spoilt. The local government did not help in situations where there were overhead water tanks in the nearby settlements from where water could have been sourced for some settlements like Seujnagar. As a result, people continued to suffer from lack of access to water when the motors went bust.

In Nawkata Shibodham, digging wells was not feasible as the ground beneath was rocky. People depended on nearby nizra or wells fed by nizra. During January to April, the nizra’s water flow became little more than a trickle and women woke up at 2.00 am in the night to fill...
Water. If one person took all the water, the next person had to wait till water accumulated in the well. Filling water buckets had negative effects on women’s health, as they had to forego sleep to fill water besides having to carry heavy loads. The constant stress of collecting sufficient water led to negative impacts on mental health. In Mithingapuri, women stated that since they spent a lot of time on collecting water, they had little time to cook food properly. They responded to the paucity of water by using less water for washing vegetables and cleaning themselves. These compromises on hygiene resulted in frequent illnesses.

“We have no peace [in our lives]. We live under constant pressure for water. We go to work for the entire day and run for water after coming back in the evening.”

In settlements such as Teenug Ganeshpur, water was supplied from a nearby water tank. The supply was managed by the local Jal Samiti (water committee) which charged INR 50 per month as user charges. The water supply was erratic. The Jal Samiti often did not pay electricity charges on time resulting in the connection getting cut. This led to people not getting water on such days. Whether water was supplied or not, the Jal Samiti collected monthly charges. Water taps were shared between households and the pressure was less in the higher reaches of the hills. In the winter, residents were forced to purchase water from private tankers, which proved expensive.

Deprivation related to sanitation and public health:

As with water supply, disposal of waste water and solid waste was also a major concern in the hills. Unlike the plains, it was a challenge to lay these systems in place in the hilly terrain. Given the ‘illegal’ status of these settlements in the eyes of the state, investments were not very likely. In the absence of household toilets, many hill residents resorted to open defecation in the nearby forests or somebody else’s plot. This led to severe inconveniences for women and elderly. During the monsoons, this deprivation got even more severe. It also created conditions for conflicts between those caught defecating and the plot owners. Even those households that had access to toilets mostly had kutcha toilets instead of pucca toilets. In the absence of secure tenure and the constant threat of evictions, they were not willing to risk investing in the construction of pucca toilets. Lack of water supply deterred residents from constructing toilets. Kutcha pit toilets result in a foul smell in the entire locality leading to unhygienic conditions that resulted in health-related implications for the residents of the hill settlements.

| Table 2: Waste disposal strategies in hill settlements in Guwahati |
|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Settlement             | Waste disposal strategies | Solid waste |
| Seujnagar              | Absent, depend on natural drains | - |
| Sangmagrahi            | Open defecation in forest, kutcha pit toilets | Narrow natural and dug drains |
| Teenug Ganeshpur       | Kutcha pit toilets | Kutcha pits, narrow channels | Burning the waste |
| Sripur                 | Kutcha pit toilets, Pucca toilets | Kutcha drains prone to collapse | - |
| Mithingapuri           | Open defecation in forest, shared kutcha pit toilets | Absent, depend on natural drains | - |
| Nawkata Shibodham      | Open defecation, kutcha pit toilets | Absent, depend on natural drains | - |

Deprivation related to poor accessibility:

These settlements did not have any pucca roads. The kutcha roads that existed were cut in the hills by the residents themselves or by the Unnyan Samitis. Given the steep terrain, reaching these settlements was a challenging task, more so during the monsoons when the kutcha roads turned slippery. Their children were not able to attend school regularly during the monsoons. Even during the dry months, the streets became unusable – especially for women - after dusk as there were no streetlights. In the case of Sripur, where the community had installed streetlights on their own, they were vandalized by local drunkards. The steep slope and poor condition of roads added to the cost of provisions in the grocery shops in the hills.

Since the monsoons turned the roads unusable, it also affected the ability of the residents to look for work and access livelihood opportunities. The lack of roads had implications on people’s access to healthcare.

“When I experienced labour pain, my family and neighbours put me on a ‘sangri’ and four men took me down the hill. I suffered a lot. I was thinking that my life would not be saved.”

“I have problem in my knees, because I fell down once when I was walking up the hill with fire-wood. A woman took me to my home.”

Even ambulances did not respond to their emergency calls, as they could not climb the narrow, slippery kutcha roads. Hill dwellers depended on chemists and physicians in the plains. In critical times of illness or pregnancy, the deprivation of access became even more evident. On the whole, lack of accessibility had negative implications on people’s savings, livelihood, education and healthcare.

CONFLICTS DUE TO DEPRIVATIONS

Water related conflicts:

Lack of water supply to the hills settlements by the GMC resulted in many types of everyday conflicts. The residents of the six settlements largely depended on community sources such as the dug wells or nizra for water. Some wells were dug by a group of households using their own funds. Conflicts arose particularly in the dry months when water sources went dry. Each settlement had different kinds of problems resulting in the manifestation of conflicts. In cases like Seujnagar where nizra was the major source of water, those living on the upper reaches were able to collect water before it reached the lower part. This created a situation for conflict between people living on the upper and lower stretches. If some residents drew more water than others from common sources, it often led to verbal (and sometimes physical) conflicts. The residents also put pipes under the nizra to divert water to their cluster. The pipes got clogged with mud, especially during the monsoons, which limited the supply of water. This led to conflicts among residents who blamed each other for not taking care of the pipes.

In Nawkata Shibodham, the household women woke up and filled water before 6.00 am in the night, as the streets from where they filled water would dry up during the lean season that stretched from January to April. Each woman would get to fill only two buckets. Some would come with more buckets which led to more (verbal and physical) conflicts. Those in a regular job, needed to leave on time and preferred to take only two buckets of water. They felt the pinch when people filled more than two buckets of water. There were also constant conflicts between residents and families who brew local liquor. Liquor brewing required more water than what was available to the residents for domestic purposes. Although illegal, several families resorted to brewing liquor in order to supplement their otherwise meagre incomes.

In Mithingapuri, which had 52 dwelling units, 22 of them depended on one well that had good quality water. Residents queued up with their vessels, waiting for a long time to return with a small quantity of water. Again, verbal and physical fights were common as queuing took up a long time.
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**Slippery, muddy roads in and Teenug Ganeshpur**

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Since livelihood was dependent on water from wells, the lack of availability of water has been a significant issue. Residents had to wake up in the middle of the night to fill their vessels, or people were forced to stand in a long queue to fill their vessels at the nizra. During the winter, the water flow from the nizra was so minimal that it was not sufficient even to fill a vessel.

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“The price of land in the plains is too high for us. If we would have capacity to buy a land in plains why would we come to live here with so many hardships?”

“As we are tribes, we know that we have right to live on hills. We do not need patta. It has been mentioned in the legislation. We are khilangia manu (indigenous people) so we have right to live anywhere in the Assam and northeast.”

About half the households in these six settlements were tribals (88 per cent of them Bodos by ethnicity), another 30 per cent Assamese Hindus and the rest migrants from neighbouring states. The households were low-income; about 72 per cent of them with a monthly income of less than INR 10,000 in 2014. Three-fifths of them had come to the city in last 15 years and one-eighth of them were born in Guwahati city.

HILL SETTLEMENTS: DEPRIVATIONS AS CONFLICT AND CONFLICTS DUE TO DEPRIVATIONS

“Poverty, Inequality and Violence in Indian Cities: Towards Inclusive Policies and Planning,” a three-year research project (2012-16) undertaken by Centre for Urban Equity (CUE), CEPT University in Ahmedabad and Guwahati, and Institute for Human Development in Delhi and Patna, is funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada and Department of International Development (DIFD), UK under the global programme Safe and Inclusive Cities (SAIC).

The research analyses the pathways through which exclusionary urban planning and governance leads to different types of violence on the poor and by the poor in Indian cities.

The CUE research takes an expansive approach to violence, examining structural or indirect violence (material deprivation, inequality, exclusion), direct violence (direct infliction of physical or psychological harm), overt conflict and its links to violence and different types of crime, noting that not all types of violence are considered as crime (for example, violence by the state), and not all types of crimes are considered as violence (for example, theft).

In Guwahati, the largest city in and gateway to the Northeast India, the research has focused on two hills, two street vendors’ markets and women’s safety in transport. The two hills together have 25 settlements, of which six have been where primary research was conducted. These hills on the city’s periphery have house largely low-income households who have moved to hills to find land to construct ownership housing from their former rental housing.

Research Team (Guwahati):
Aseem Mishra, Danskiri Mahadevia, Yogi Joseph, Arup Das (sSTEP)