Relocation of Urban Slums: A Behavioral Investigation

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Abstract

Urbanization has been progressing rapidly all over the world during past few years. As a result of it new towns and cities are emerging, while existing ones are increasing in size. Cities which are already large are gradually turning into mega cities i.e. cities with population exceeding 10 million. In such huge congregations of human habitation, spatial allocations of economics activities as well as housing for people have been a serious challenge for urban management. Escalating property price is possibly fallout of rising pressure on urban land. Such pressure sometimes leads to skyrocketing of property prices, pushing people down in terms of the house specification that they may want to buy. Not all such people, who migrate to large cities, succeed in getting a proper house for dwelling. Downward push on house affordability could potentially drive some people out of market. Such people might end up in dwelling arrangements that do not qualify as houses. In urban landscape, mostly in developing world cities, many people live in shanties and other similar arrangements which are considered to be inadequate for habitation purposes. The congregations of such arrangements are generally known as slums. Urban slums are thus those dwelling arrangements which are considered unsuitable for habitation due to certain inadequacies in their respective features. They might be deficient in terms of space, stability of structure or access to urban services.

Affordability is probably the most compelling reason that drives people to live in these slums despite uninhabitable conditions. A welfare state however cannot allow its residents to dwell in such insufficient housing which is why rehabilitation of urban slums has been acknowledged as an important public policy instrument. According to Millennium Development Goals (MDG) of United Nations, these targets are very important for ensuring environment sustainability. In its proposal documents towards MDG, 'Cities Alliance' defines slums as "high density, squalid central city tenements to spontaneous squatter settlements without legal recognition or rights, sprawling at the edge of cities". Goal 7, under MDG focuses on 'ensuring environment sustainability' and target 11 under this goal aims to make significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers worldwide by year 2020; and to finally eradicate slums altogether from urban landscape leading to "cities without slums". Though the actual accomplishment of the target might be unattainable due to various reasons, the focus of public policy towards slum-rehabilitation has been clearly established in policy domain.

One major problem in rehabilitation of urban slums is that property right could not be assigned to these people in many cases as the land parcels occupied by them are owned by some other entities. Most slum-settlements exist on land parcel which are not legally owned by them, and some amount of eviction threat exists in most cases. In some cases, when state government owns the respective land parcel and could transfer it to slum-dwellers, the slums could be rehabilitated on the same site (in-situ rehabilitation). Alternatively, people residing in such slums could be moved to an alternative site as a relocation and resettlement (R&R) program and assisted to settle in there.

Despite their best efforts to make it easier for slum-dwellers, R&R of slum-dwellers has been a tough challenge for urban management. As compared to in-situ rehabilitation, where the assistance comes unconditionally to them, R&R requires them to forgo their central city location advantage and resettle into outskirts of the city. Such change of residential location makes it a complex case of cost-benefit comparison and decision-making by slum-dwellers. They have to bear cost of relocation like loss/change of employment, longer commuting distance, and disruption of social ties and so on. In exchange for these costs, the benefits come in form of a highly subsidized house with tenure security (freedom from eviction threats).

How slum-dwellers make a choice while comparing such costs and benefits could be a fertile ground for discussion. Due to its multidimensional reach, program governance could impact many individual components of these costs and benefits. For example, public transport provisions suiting to their requirements could possibly bring down the costs, while community participation in site selection and monitoring of processes could enhance the benefits. In other words, better urban management could potentially lead to cost reduction and benefits enhancements to slum-dwellers during R&R and consequently raise the acceptance of such programs. A corollary of this would be to say that poor acceptance of R&R offers could be attributed at least partially, to bad urban management.

From a policy perspective, this proposition could lead to many implications in terms of design and execution of government scheme. Due to the complexities involved in R&R of urban slums, examination of the impact of urban management on various aspects of a relocation program is an interesting challenge for public policy. However, this domain has received very little attention in academic research, and our study attempt to address this gap. The aim of our research has been to examine those factors which influence behavioral response outcome when urban slum-dwellers are offered to be relocated and resettled in an alternative place. Since this problem focused on the factors behind behavioral response, we examined it in the conceptual framework of Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). We began with the assumption that intentions to accept R&R are positively influenced by attitude as well as subjective norms favoring it. In addition to these two, a higher perception of control over post relocation resettlement process (PBC) is assumed to be positively linked with intentions. In line with earlier empirical studies, PBC is taken as a joint construct of self-efficacy and controllability, which means that higher level of efficacy in terms of getting a job or resettling is positively associated with intentions. In the same way, higher level of beliefs about responsiveness of the program governance is supposed to improve the controllability of post-

relocation resettlement and such beliefs are assumed to positively influence intentions to accept R&R. It means that better perceptions about the governance of a program would raise its acceptability. With these hypotheses we formulated a TPB model suiting to our research context.

Empirical validation of the model has been conducted through primary data which were gathered through a survey of those slums in Bangalore city which are in the process of being relocated.

In our study, for the first time TPB has been used to examine the predictors of behavioral intention in a sports team like situation. The outcome in such situation is not only influenced by the factors affecting each individual separately, but also by the emergent group properties like coherence and mutual support. Perception about collectivity has not been examined as a determinant of individual behavior in existing studies and we have attempted to address this gap by extending the TPB model to include this possibility. Extension of TPB model is one of our key contribution through this research. Another major contribution offered by our study is that this is, to our knowledge, the first rigorous study on the preferences of slum-dwellers. We interacted with slum-dwellers and various other stakeholders to get insight into the behavioral response of slum-dwellers on a relocation and resettlement offer. The information gathered through these interactions have been analyzed through a theoretical framework and the research model based on it has been tested with primary dataset. The dataset itself was gathered in a difficult and physically threatening environment by conducting a survey in four slums located in different places of Bangalore city. The primary data gathered through the survey have been analyzed helping us get an insight into the thinking process of slum-dwellers.

In terms of understanding the behavioral response of people to a government program, our research contributes to better understanding of the perceptions of governance of the program the resultant acceptability of it. Very few studies (if any) have attempted to quantify the perceptions about the governance of a program and our attempt to do so is another major contribution that we offer to existing academic literature, particularly in public policy domain. We have identified the way program governance affect the receptivity of government schemes and how difference in gender or literacy status could influence the relative importance of different parameters of program governance.

This research has been our sincere attempt to improve the understanding about the receptivity of governments program aimed to improve the lives of poor people, particularly those living in urban slums. By examining their behavioral responses to R&R offer and the specific factors influencing these responses, we have offered, through our analysis, insights into the perceptions of poor people towards government programs and the implications of such perceptions for public policy. We hope that our work would help in improving the understanding about poor people, including those living in urban slums and serve the purpose of better formulation of public policy aimed towards such people.