

## Investigating social justice in urban development projects in India

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### Abstract

Urban Study in India has thick literature, broadly encompass the multiple reasons for rapid migration and challenges in the cities. However, there is very thin literature available in the public domain which dealt with the interface of social justice, the role of institution and development projects. The ongoing challenges of urban development have its imprints on politics and planning of development projects. Urban development projects are argued to take forward the issues of the marginalized and disadvantaged communities. However, UN data suffice that disparity is prevalent in the cities, and it needs to be addressed effectively. The study takes the central theme of social justice for investigating urban poverty and identifying politics of different stakeholders, e.g. political parties, government institutions, and non-government organizations. It analyzes the core agenda of major urban development programs JNNURM, AMRUT, and Smart Cities Mission with the perspective of just city concept. The article concludes that different development projects promising change and transforming the city are vague and fuzzy. Overlapping objectives of these projects make it susceptible to failure because it undermines the aspiration of the poor and marginalized section, and ignore the theme of justice, i.e. procedural justice, justice of capabilities, distributive justice and justice of recognition.

**Keywords:** social justice, institution, development, smart city mission

### Introduction

In today's time, claims of urban development seem increasing. Government announcements and agenda for changing lives of the people are significantly reported in the public arena. Political parties keep echoing its development program for the poor and marginalized section. It appears to be a potential change in the lives of the people. It seems to be happening a lot regarding improvement in the condition of the urban poor. Nevertheless, the situation does not change the life of the city's inhabitants considerably as observed by visiting the field and looking into the design of development programs. Cases of social injustice and shrinking rights of urban poor are widely recognized and apparently visible through the data and ground reality <sup>[1]</sup>. It has been one of the principal ideas of considering social justice as a precondition of any development program but does not seem to be valued for sustainable development projects in the current scenario. Cities are crawling with traffic jams, scarcity of water, poor health and other essential infrastructure.

In the present time, development has overshadowed issue of resource distribution and recognition of marginalized. Even it, it is done the states' intention is questionable. Private partnership deals by the government do not seem to very convincing. We have an example of a case of Kathputali Colony in National Capital Territory. Delhi government contracts out to Raheja Developer for constructing housing for the slum dwellers, which have been living there for many decades. Slum dwellers asserted their rights, and there was an issue of corruption, lack of transparency and benefiting the

private by excluding slum dwellers by ignoring participatory and decision-making approach. Moreover, this deal is under legal and political scrutiny and yet exists to be suspended. However, this is ice breaking moment to look into present development policies in the context of the overarching framework of social justice. It is imperative to look into the advancement of the standard of living and transformation of the poor people. It is the need of time by analysis public policies by keeping social justice and urban poor in the center of the debate. Presently, the focus is only on "development." Therefore, there is a need to deconstruct development regarding the distribution of resources and politics of recognition, which we can call social justice in a broader sense.

After liberalization in 1991 and 74<sup>th</sup> amendment of the constitution, urban policies have broadly shifted to market-oriented approach. The first critical phase was 1996 for urban governance when states' governments are directed to created avenues for revenue generation. However, there was not a very market friendly proposition that time. Promotion of market has seen during policy formulation of Smart Cities Mission in 2015. Therefore, one of the emerging questions is to know the feasibility and the potential of the market economy in transforming the city keeping social justice in the center. Therefore, the paper objective is to look into how recent involvement of market in developing infrastructure is working for transforming cities, in particular for the poor and marginalized groups. It also aims to examine the question of social justice in making smart and developed cities. The paper emphasized upon the idea of social justice broadly conceptualized by Nancy Fraser, Amartya Sen, and Iris Marion Young. It organizes debate around recognition and

1. Census of India (2011) and my field study in 44 slums in Jaipur (Rajasthan) and 45 slums in Patna (Bihar) during January March 2016 to June 2016.

procedural justice apart from distributional justice. Further, it aims to understand the development projects and capability of accessing to institutions especially urban local body and policy agenda of engagement with civil society organizations for inclusion and wide representation.

This paper takes the central theme as social justice and debates it as priority agenda to understand urban poverty and multiple stakeholders, e.g. political parties, government institutions, and non-government organizations. It analyzes the core agenda of major urban development projects such as JNNURM, AMRUT, and Smart Cities. Consequently, it takes note of the secondary source of data and integrates it with theoretical foundation, which is based on the just city projects. Development projects promising to change the city are one of the foundational approaches to the transformation of cities. However, overlapping objectives of these projects and inability in delineating approach for inclusion of a disadvantaged section of city inhabitants makes susceptible to failure. Urban theorists from all over the world reached a consensus for considering social justice as an important strand of public policy formulation under agenda of sustainable development. So, does India's flagship projects for urban development underlines the strands mentioned above for ensuring rights of the poor or it remains unaddressed.

Urban population is increasing, challenges are emerging, and planners are introducing their algorithm for making the city livable for the residents. However, it is questionable that whom these planners and government development agencies targeting in their development projects. It is apparent that cities are full of challenges. Issues of drinking water, housing, fresh air, transportation, and employment are prevalent in most of the cities in India and other developing countries. Poor individuals in rural areas are moving towards cities for better job opportunities and availability of essential services including education and health facilities. However, most of them work in the informal and unorganized sector as a daily wage laborer. Nevertheless, there is also a hierarchy within the informal sector. The most vulnerable population is living in the unfit condition in the cities. That is why cities like Delhi having a significant number of the population are living in slums.

According to census data (2011), out of the total population of 1210.2 million, about 377.1 million are in urban areas, which is around 31.6 percent. There has been an increase 3.35 percentage points during 2001-2011. However, the condition of people living or migrating to urban areas does not sound very well. According to Census (2011) data, people living in slums are over 65 million, which was 52 million in 2001. However, it seems that slum population has grown slower than the average urban population. Nevertheless, some of the cities have shown some peculiar trend of people living in slums, which needs urgent intervention. Cities like Delhi and Mumbai have a major portion of the population living in slums. Which is need of urgent intervention? So, there is a hidden emergency to address these issues, which slum dwellers are facing in these cities. Essential services including housing, drinking water, sanitation, and health are in miserable condition, and a considerable chunk of the population has to cope up with such condition.

In this scenario, it becomes necessary to look into the

development planning and projects at macro and micro level. However, this paper does emphasize of the major project such as Smart Cities Mission and AMRUT programs. However, it is also important to analyze local level development program analysis. Every city has a different pattern of population, gender, employment and caste structure. So, it is needed to focus on city level planning. In sum, this paper attempts to address these questions. Do the development projects address the issues of urban poor? Is present development programs formulated keeping social justice in mind? How can a city be made just?

This paper is divided into three sections. The first section entails idea of this paper as an introduction, which broadly emphasizes around normative ideas of just and equitable city development. The second section discusses major literature focused around the concept of social justice and constructs key indicators to analyze development agenda. The third section focused up multiple development projects and did a comparative analysis by keeping the ingrained idea of fairness and equity. The final section concludes.

### **Social Justice: Equity, Distribution, Capability, and Recognition**

Henri Lefebvre's (1968) idea of a "right to the city" is very prominent in the present situation. His argument is viable and needs to be looked in proposing development projects in the current scenario of urban challenges and an increasing number of urban poor. However, his argument was more focused on participatory planning and emphasis over transferring decision-making capacity to the inhabitant of the city. He argued that those who inhabit in the city should have decision-making power over the production of urban space and the right to use or appropriate. However, his notion of inhabitants might be questioned at several levels, e.g. who is an inhabitant of the city, does migrant count in this, does enfranchisement is the core parameter for selecting inhabitants. However, this proves to be a necessary premise for locating people and life in the cities. It is also important to bring here Brundtland Commission Report (1987), which also seems to be a major benchmark for the development of city planning and projects. However, the focus of this report was to concentrate upon the mechanism for developing sustainable cities and sustainable approach to urban development. It popularized this idea and argued that persistent poverty and other social inequities would undermine any efforts to sustain earth's life-support system. Poverty, illiteracy, inadequate health care, and other social ills make it difficult to think and act in the long-term and build human capital necessary to support sustainable environmental practices too. The powerful message of sustainability underlines that upcoming generation should enjoy the same social, economic and ecological benefit as of the current generation, which is popularly known as intergenerational equity. Susan S. Fainstein argued the similar point of view in her book *The Just City*. She argues bringing reform in the city planning by integrating structural obstacles in it. She conceptualized the just city approach through the visualizing progressive planning of the city through embracing equity and material well-being as a forefront theme. Moreover, she stresses upon considering diversity and participation for it. Fainstein asserts three core themes -

diversity, democracy, and equity. She explains diversity an important objective of urban policy. She explains (2005, p. 4):

Diversity attracts human capital, encourages innovation, and ensures fairness and equal access to a variety of groups. Indeed, by the logic, the competitive advantage of cities, and thus the most promising approach to attaining economic success, lies in enhancing diversity within the society, economic base, and built environment.

While equity is considered as a distribution of both material and nonmaterial benefits derived from public policy that does not favor those who are already better off at the beginning (2010, 36). So, this idea seems to be as integrative ideas of Nancy Fraser, Iris Marion Young, Nancy Fraser, and other. Moreover, the premises directed towards issues of equity, sustainability, distribution of resources and recognition to the disadvantaged for just city development. In this process, social justice becomes a guiding normative principle for the development of the urban region, which informs and defines what, is right and what should we do. However, the idea of justice emerged from John Rawls' conception and refined during the time.

John Rawls (1971) writing of theories of social justice or the socially just distribution of goods in society is a reference point to start the debate on social justice or talking about distribution and recognition for the marginalized and disadvantaged in the city. However, Rawls premise is taken as a fundamental idea in the present context, and it has broadened over the time. Rawls argued that inequity in the distribution of goods be just only if the unequal distribution is to the greatest benefit of the least-advantaged members of society. His ideas of justice as fairness also included the notion that people should have equality of opportunity based on comparable merits and that all individuals have equal rights to basic liberties. Fairness should this be judged regarding not only outcomes but also opportunities or processes, differentiated as outcome equity and process equity broadly in the geographical literature.

However, the idea of John Rawls critiqued by many scholars. The contribution of Iris Marion Young and Amartya Sen is important in this context. Amartya Sen questions Rawls liberal notion of justice, especially his emphasis on the right to basic liberties. Iris Marion Young does not count importance of a just society but argues it is limiting because it tends to focus on just allocation of material resource (e.g. income) and to ignore social structures (e.g. gender relations, power, and privilege) that determine the distributive pattern in the first place (Young 1990).

Therefore, it is important to examine questions of justice, particularly concerning decision-making and capacity for action. David Harvey (1973) in his study *Social Justice and the City* explores the idea of distributive justice from a spatial perspective. It underlines the idea that just distribution should be justly achieved and the three primary criteria, in order, for evaluating just distribution should be a need, contribution to the public good and merit should be considered. Harvey argued that justice should not rest on universal ideas of morality but should rather be viewed as "contingent upon the social process operating in society as a whole (1973, p. 15)."

So, looking into the argument of social justice, the broader idea conceptualizes four important strands – justice of distribution, Justice of recognition, justice of capabilities, and justice of procedure. However, most of these theoretical understandings are debated at length and seem to work well in constellations. While, borrowing views of Nancy Fraser and Iris Marion Young, the idea of the development of just city becomes stronger. So, "there is sufficient consensus on the value of justice, if not its particular manifestations, to support its application to all public decisions" (Fainstein 2010, p. 45)<sup>[4]</sup>. So, justice can be seen as the consensual outcome in ideal condition for the development of the city. Martha Nussbaum (2000) delineates that approach to development should be assessed for its ability to recognize the problems of poverty, discrimination, and incapability because of structural and historical contexts, she recommends for its solution. She proposes the idea of the capability approach. However, the major critic of this method is that it is only viable if the state has institutions and it's provide solution so that the capable person can access the facility.

In the following section, the emerged theoretical understanding is located and investigated keeping some urban development projects in the focus.

### Urban Development Projects

Major urban development projects are initiated after constitutional mandate to urban local bodies (ULBs) through 74<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment of 1992. After this, the major flagship program of UPA (United Progressive Alliance) government was JNNURM (Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission) implement in 2005. It was a comprehensive city development scheme for seven year period, and it was extended for another two years till 2014. Its aim was to encourage urban centers to initiate steps for bringing improvement in service delivery mechanism of essential services. JNNURM has brought a considerable change in the approach to urban development projects. However, before this, India has not a much effective policy for transforming urban life. There was a plan implemented in 1996 known as UDPI (Urban Development Plans for Formulation and Implementation). UDPI was a guideline circulated to all the states' governments, which underlined statement was innovative approaches virtually focused to financial mobilization and least about basic urban issues.

So, it could be said that JNNURM is an important strand in the journey of urban development. It is a mission designed to have reform-linked investment through financially sustainable approach by making efficient infrastructure and improved service delivery (Kundu 2014)<sup>[7]</sup>. However, She asserts that developed states and big cities were able to take advantage of this scheme. Kundu (2014, p. 628)<sup>[7]</sup> explored:

Out of the 65 mission cities, the state capitals and millions plus cities may not require the extent of funding under the umbrella of JNNURM as most of these cities have the capacity to generate resources. In fact, funding may be scaled down for them to increase the funding for smaller towns. Funding for the mission cities was decided on the basis of population-based on 2001 census; the smaller states with smaller towns had some disadvantage over the

large cities in access to the fund which has resulted in disparity in the creation of infrastructure across urban centers across the country...JNNURM mandated preparation of City Development Plans (CDP) and Detailed Project Reports (DPR) before taking up any projects, in many cases, the CDPs failed to link spatial planning with socio-economic planning and became a mere consideration of socio-economic aspect and excluded peri-urban areas.

So, this study apparently describes how vulnerable cities are treated and how does equity, recognition is assigned. However, it is imperative to say that the planners going to learn from it in the near future. If not, how cities would become smart and would be ready to cope up with increasing migrants. So, we are also looking into two new important urban planning devised in 2015.

After this newly elected NDA (National Democratic Alliance) introduced two major urban development projects AMRUT (Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation) and Smart Cities Mission in 2015. AMRUT's important agenda is to provide essential services, such water supply, sewerage, urban transport and building amenities for improving the quality of life. It declaration determines poor and the disadvantaged as a national priority <sup>[2]</sup>. Its purpose is to focus on these three major areas:

1. Installation of tap with assured supply water and a sewerage connection
2. Development of greenery and well maintained open spaces to increase amenity value of cities
3. Development of public transport or constructing facilities for non-motorized transport such cycling and walking for reducing pollution

Smart Cities Project does not give a certain parameter to measure cities as a smart city. It says smartness of the cities keeps varying. However, the approach of the smart city read as "the objective is to provide cities that provide core infrastructure and give a decent quality of life to its citizens, a clean and sustainable environment and application for smart solutions. The focus is on the sustainable, and inclusive development and the idea is to look at compact areas, create a replicable model which will act as a lighthouse to other aspiring cities." <sup>[3]</sup>. Smart Cities Mission also reiterates its agenda for developing vulnerable areas such slums into better-planned ones (ibid.). Chattaraj (2015) <sup>[2]</sup> outlines the smart cities mission of India keeping the trend of global firms and media report in the centre. She says that attributes of the smart cities mission are a centralized control room with real-time data, digital sensors to locate parking spots, electronic pods. Moreover, nitty-gritty of smart cities mission in India focused around these key features - good governance, adequate energy availability and efficient energy usage, smart buildings, improved and integrated public transport systems, robust technological, afford and good quality health care, and the

sustainable and healthy environment (Suresh and Ramchandran, 2016) <sup>[14]</sup>.

However, there is thin literature exist, which criticize such mission and give an in-depth analysis for making it just and fair in Indian context. However, initial analysis with the perspective of social justice suggests that India's Smart City Mission does not have a very inclusive and integrated structure to maintain democracy, diversity, and equity at first hand. On the contrary, infusing private money in developing infrastructure does it going to help the people living peri-urban in accessing basic health care and concerned services. It has been the outcome of the city of involving private stakeholders in constructing housing for the poor in cities like Mumbai far away to succeed. Freidman (2002) put his dissent about engaging with private firms in executing social service and welfare programs. Apparently in his book "Capitalism and Freedom" that private businesses have the only responsibility to use public resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits as it can go under the rules of the game. Such argument sets a critical premise for involving a private partner in developing city infrastructure, how the government chalks out to include its disadvantaged population in the process of development. Instead, ensuring public participation in the decision-making process of the city development, it does not qualify for the sustainable and just city. Chattaraj (2015) <sup>[2]</sup> provide cities' template through the idea of veteran scholars Charles Correa that urban planning should be modeled through looking into the relationship between spatial form and the economic and social of cities and neighborhood. Mathur (2015) also contends the similar point of view and focused on the main stakeholders especially decision-makers, urban developers, and planners and suggest for the rigorous adoption of environmental technologies for achieving a viable balance between growth and the sparing use of resources.

However, it is early to evaluate its impact on the ground, but policy documents of the smart city mission looking through the lens of social justice do not sound convincing and vibrant, especially for the urban poor and disadvantaged population. Cities like Delhi, where a significant portion of the population resides in the slum, which is unfit and unhealthy for a human being. Cities development regarding infrastructure will convert it to some highways and wider roads. However, how does it benefit the poor, who are being forced to the periphery of the city in the name of developing of infrastructure? Unless, we address these critical aspects, achieving the goal of smart city mission is almost impossible. It should also be kept in mind that migrants will keep coming to the town because India has failed in showing farming as a lucrative career. So, The planners should also take such reality in mind as well as government's immediate need to invest its attention for advancing farmers' life for envisioning a better life for everyone.

## Conclusion

This trajectory of cities' planning and development approach does not find convincing for urban poor. It planners and city developers have virtually ignored the vision of justice and equity in a broader sense. The mission and implementation of the project do not comply with the grassroots realities as well as abortive in identifying capabilities and potential of

2. See Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation, <http://amrut.gov.in/writereaddata/The%20Mission.pdf>, accessed on 24 August 2016.
3. See Smart Cities Mission, <http://smartcities.gov.in/writereaddata/Smart%20City%20Features.pdf>, accessed on 24 August 2016

generating money, which appears to be unjust and partial. Renaming programs and policy documents could be an instant relief for the present government, but such steps are hardly going to bring significant change in the life of the urban poor. The major areas of intervention projects in past years such as JNNURM and present formulation of Smart City project fails to recognize emerging challenges in the cities in particular for the poor living in unfit conditions. Challenges of housing, health, illiteracy are unaddressed. While traffic congestion and huge population influx underline development of sustainable infrastructure. In this process, the most prominent stakeholder, who suffer due these are not included significantly. Therefore, it is need of hour designing urban development projects by keeping several points in mind, which are (a) making city just for everyone (b) narrowing it ensure social justice in terms of distribution, capability, and opportunity (c) multi-layer consultation for realizing felt need of the community (d) including ideas of civil society organizations. However, this point can only be included if the state is intended to shape the cities as right and just city for everyone through the wider integration of economically and socially marginalized section.

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