

Land, Livelihood and Living Conditions: Innovations to Address Vulnerabilities of the Urban Poor through Integrated Governance in Odisha, India

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Introduction

While the world at large is steadily moving towards an urban future, over one billion people or 24 percent of the global urban population continue to live in slums. Slum clusters in fast-growing cities of the Global South frequently depict the most visible concentration of urban poverty, sub-standard housing quality, extreme overcrowding, unhygienic living conditions, and inadequate access to water, sanitation, and other basic amenities (Figures 1–3). Adverse living conditions make slum areas more vulnerable to epidemics, natural disasters, and climate change threats compared to other parts of cities. The Covid-19 pandemic has further widened the urban divide in the Global South, as slum-dwellers, who are predominantly engaged in the informal economy, have been hit disproportionately harder by the lockdowns and suffered huge livelihood losses.

¹ UN-Habitat, *Key Slum Upgrading Messages*.

² UN-Habitat, *The Urban SDG Monitoring Series: Monitoring SDG 11.1.1*.

Perceptions of and urban policies about slum settlements have come a long way over the past decades. While several cities had earlier sought to undertake slum clearance and relocation, they have now recognised the contributions of people living in these impoverished neighbourhoods in providing a range of services essential for the functioning of the city. Not only do many slums, such as Dharavi in Mumbai (Figure 4), provide shelter to millions of people, but they are also vibrant economic clusters that facilitate bottom-up entrepreneurship, generate jobs, and contribute positively to the city economy. Taking into consideration the close interdependencies between access to shelter, tenure security, livelihood, and healthy living conditions, recent global policy discourses, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and the New Urban Agenda, have started emphasising in-situ upliftment of slums over their relocation wherever possible.¹ Policy lessons of slum upgrading also strongly suggest the need to include residents in the planning process.² Reflecting upon such a participatory approach, this paper discusses innovation in improving living conditions of the urban poor through a comprehensive slum upgrading programme being implemented by the Indian state of Odisha. More precisely, the case study provides valuable lessons regarding collaborative planning, community engagement, gender inclusion, and data-driven governance to achieve urban sustainability objectives in developing countries.



Figure 1 : Slums in South Africa.



Figure 2 : A view of Soweto and Lindi, suburbs of Nairobi belonging to Kibera, the largest urban slum in Africa.



Figure 3 : Slum Rocinha, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil.



Figure 4 : Dharavi slum in Mumbai.

Towards participatory slum upgrading in Odisha

Participatory slum upgrading, however, faces many implementation challenges. On the one hand, civic agencies encounter difficulties in extending infrastructure services to informal settlements, until they are regularised and included in official land records – which is a long-drawn legal process. On the other hand, slum residents are also unwilling to invest in environmental betterment on their own, as they do not have property rights and live under constant threat of eviction. Moreover, participatory planning involving slum residents is also time-consuming, as it requires extensive co-ordination with large numbers of stakeholders. Most cities in the Global South lack institutional capacities to undertake such complex interventions or sustain them over long periods. Meanwhile, without regular and timely investments, the rudimentary infrastructure available in the slum areas deteriorates and environmental conditions further worsen.

³PRS Legislative Research, “Odisha Budget Analysis 2020-21.”

Odisha, located on India’s eastern coast, is a natural resource-rich and predominantly rural state with a low per capita GDP of INR 116,614 (about US\$ 1,500).³ However, in recent years Odisha’s economic growth rate has accelerated, and the state has also started to rapidly urbanise. According to the Indian Census (2011), the state had an urban population of about 7 million, 23 percent of whom were slum dwellers. Coastal parts of the state are more urbanised but also more disaster-prone. Tropical cyclones and floods, which hit the state regularly, most directly impact the lives and livelihoods of slum dwellers (Figure 5).

Taking note of the difficulties faced by the urban poor, the state government took a policy decision to integrate the slum areas into the regular urban governance mechanism across the state through a multipronged strategy. Aimed at reducing vulnerability of the urban poor, the state government provides tenure security thus turning existing slum settlements into vibrant and liveable habitats, and prioritises small and medium-sized towns in the first phase, as smaller towns have been growing at a faster rate than large cities. Accordingly, in the first phase, 63 small and 46 medium-sized towns were covered, with five bigger cities to follow in the second stage. The legal dimension of the policy was addressed by enacting the Odisha Land Rights to Slum Dwellers Act of 2017.



Figure 5 : Nolia Sahi slum in coastal Odisha.

⁴ In Odisha, small towns refer to areas governed as Notified Area Committees; medium-sized towns are governed by municipalities; bigger cities are governed as Municipal Corporations.

⁵ Department of Housing and Urban Development, Government of Odisha, “The Jaga Mission.”

⁶ World Habitat Awards, “Odisha Liveable Habitat Mission.”

The Odisha Land Rights to Slum Dwellers Act (2017) is landmark legislation to make cities in Odisha more equal by empowering the urban poor. Under the Act, a ‘certificate of land right’ is issued to the slum dwellers for residential usage and provides a legal basis for the regularisation of slums along with the provision of basic civic amenities. The Act covers slum settlements with at least 20 households located on government land. It allows the legalisation of land in actual occupation by slum households up to a maximum limit of 60 sqm in small towns and 45 sqm in medium-sized towns.⁴ Up to 30 sqm of land is allotted free. The balance amount is payable at a nominal rate. Slums located in environmentally vulnerable and disaster-prone areas are to be relocated and provided with 30 sqm of land. The beneficiaries are not allowed to transfer or sell the property, but they can pass on the ownership to their children. Allocation of land rights also focuses on gender inclusion, and the property documents are issued in the names of both spouses. They are also allowed to mortgage their property papers as collateral for additional housing loans from financial institutions.

Jaga Mission: Combined land titling and slum upgrading initiative

The Odisha state government sought to overcome the above challenges innovatively by launching the Jaga Mission (Odisha Liveable Habitat Mission), a composite land titling and slum upgrading programme. Since its inception in 2017, the programme has been able to provide land titles to over 51,000 households and complete household survey of all 197,000 households spread across 109 small and medium-sized towns and spurred comprehensive slum upgrading throughout the state.⁵

The Jaga Mission shows how an integrated multi-city planning strategy for slum areas can reduce disaster risks by improving housing conditions and increasing access to safe water and sanitation facilities, generate low-skill employment opportunities, and empower marginalised communities by institutionalising their inclusion in local governance structures. In accomplishing the multipronged developmental objectives, the programme has demonstrated several innovative approaches in its planning process regarding:

- Combination of top-down and bottom-up planning involving multiple stakeholders located at different levels of government
- Application of advanced geospatial technology in a people-friendly manner
- A replicable and scalable model to provide livelihood support to urban poor

In 2019, the Jaga Mission was awarded the World Habitat Award.⁶ As participatory slum upgrading is a key global sustainability target (SDG 11.1.1), Odisha’s innovative planning strategies can provide key inputs to other developing countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America facing similar challenges. The critical innovative mechanisms undertaken towards implementing the participatory slum upgrading in Odisha are given in more detail below.

Innovation 1: Multi-level governance arrangement

Governance arrangements for operationalising the land titling and slum upgrading programme are complex, as large numbers of actors are involved. In addition to the legislative initiatives discussed above, this effort involves various administrative processes, such as land-use change, identification of eligible slums, mapping of land, and validation of demographic details before property rights can be conferred and titles granted. Moreover, in Odisha, the state government did not merely issue land rights, but sought to use them as an entry point for bringing about transformative change in the slum habitats by providing basic infrastructure services such as water supply, toilets, drainage, paved roads, streetlights, direct in-house electricity supply, community centres, and play areas (Figure 6).⁷ The government has also sought to improve economic outcomes for the urban poor by generating new livelihood opportunities.

⁷ Tata Trusts, “Government of Odisha and Tata Trusts awarded the Geospatial Excellence Awards 2019.”

⁸ Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India, “Pradhan Mantri Aawas Yojana – Housing for All Mission.”



Figure 6 :
A community centre developed as part of the Jaga Mission.

To plan, finance, and implement these ambitious developmental objectives, the Jaga Mission put in place an innovative integrated governance framework that encompassed government agencies at various administrative levels, non-profit organisations, and local communities. It is pertinent here to note that, in common with most other states in India, municipal governments of small and medium-sized towns in Odisha are weak. They neither had the technical capacity to manage the complexities involved in slum upgrading nor the funds to meet additional infrastructure needs. As such, one of the most pressing challenges for the Jaga Mission was capacity and resource mobilisation.

Financing for the programme was arranged by synergising resources from various central and state government-sponsored welfare schemes and by leveraging corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds. For example, allotment of land ownership certificates made slum households eligible to access housing building assistance of INR 150,000 (about US\$ 2,000) provided by the Central Government under the PMAY (*Pradhan Mantri Aawas Yojana*; in English: Housing for All Mission) scheme.⁸ Similarly, funds for building toilets came from the Swachh Bharat ('Clean India') Mission of the Central Government. Water pipelines were laid by prioritising slum areas under Basudha Mission, a state government scheme for providing potable water to all households.

The state government addressed the technical capacity deficit by enlisting three nationally renowned research-oriented organisations with expertise in participatory planning, namely Tata Trusts, Centre for Policy Research, and Janagraha. These three organisations played significant roles in every phase of the project – from conceptual design to monitoring, to field level support for municipal bodies. The bodies hired urban planners and other development professionals as Jaga fellows to provide ‘handholding’ assistance to the local governments. Moreover, 24 local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were mobilised to improve the interface between local governments and slum dwellers.

Urban planning systems and procedures posed another critical challenge. Globally, successful slum-upgrading exercises demonstrate bottom-up planning with extensive community consultations and stakeholder engagement. In this case, complex financial arrangements involving national and state-level agencies, and the need for simultaneous programme implementation on a state-wide scale, demanded extensive vertical co-ordination and strong centralised control. To strike a balance between the contrasting demands of bottom-up and top-down planning approaches, an innovative four-tier institutional arrangement was conceptualised. At its apex, the programme is anchored by the Housing and Urban Development Department of the Government of Odisha. At the city level, each municipal body was required to constitute an Urban Area Slum Redevelopment and Resettlement Committee for inter-departmental co-ordination. Locally, each Municipal Ward Office was entrusted with nodal responsibility. At the bottom level, each slum settlement was required to form a Slum Dwellers Associations (SDA) to facilitate community consultation.

While the strengthened role of municipal Ward Offices in project delivery has reduced the distance between people and government, the involvement of the SDAs has increased accountability and transparency in governance. All residents of each slum area are members of the association and can be directly involved in planning and mapping activities impacting their neighbourhood. All upgrading projects require the concurrence of the SDAs, which must also approve all payments to contractors. Indeed, the inclusion of the SDAs into the institutional framework of the Jaga Mission has led to the emergence of a new form of urban governance through direct participation and empowerment of people at the bottom of society.

Innovation 2: Slum mapping and participatory planning

City governments all over the world face problems due to data inadequacy when dealing with informal settlements, and authentic information is hard to come by. Compared to regular neighbourhoods, slum areas are more dynamic places in terms of migration and frequently have large floating populations. Accurate measurement of land parcels, which is essential for granting property titles, is also much more complicated as informal settlements are densely packed and haphazard in layout. Physical surveying of such areas is not only time consuming,

but also often faces local resistance. Slum residents are often distrustful of civic agencies and fear eviction. To overcome these challenges appropriately and efficiently, the Jaga Mission came up with an innovative approach, involving the application of advanced drone mapping technology, followed by the deployment of community volunteers for ground truthing.⁹ Apart from speeding up the survey process, high-resolution drone maps helped with ground-level data verification and community envisioning exercises.

⁹ Chakraborty, “Building resilience.”

¹⁰ Department of Housing and Urban Development, Government of Odisha, “The Jaga Mission.”

¹¹ Chakraborty, “Building resilience.”



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Figure 7 :
Volunteers doing a participatory infrastructure needs assessment survey in Bhadrak Odisha.



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Figure 8 :
Participatory infrastructure needs assessment survey in Bhadrak, Odisha.

Indeed, the reliability, transparency, and inclusivity of cadastral data management proved a key factor behind the success of the Jaga Mission. Drone mapping helped the Jaga Mission generate high-resolution geospatial data for all 1886 slum settlements spread across 109 towns in less than two months.¹⁰ In only six-and-a-half hours, the drones were able to map 1.5 sqkm of land with a high degree of precision, a task that would have otherwise taken much more time and money through a conventional survey using digital global positioning system technology.¹¹ Data captured by the drones were used to geo-fence the boundaries of slum clusters and were then matched with revenue department land records. Subsequently, these maps were used by local NGOs to carry out field verification with the help of the SDAs to identify individual residents' property boundaries, carry out door-to-door surveys to capture demographic data, and identify the list of beneficiaries for land titling.

After allocating the land titles, in the second step, the Jaga Mission focused on improving the physical and social infrastructure of the slum clusters through a participatory planning process. While the allotment of land titles made each slum household eligible for individual housing assistance under the PMAY scheme, the government emphasised the orderly development of common areas and basic infrastructure through the provision of individual / community toilets, paved roads, streetlights, water supply, drainage, power supply, community centres, parks, and play areas. To understand the requirements of each slum settlement, the Jaga Mission entrusted the municipal Ward Office with participatory infrastructure needs assessment surveys in co-ordination with SDAs and with the help of local NGOs and Jaga Fellows (Figures 7, 8). Local area maps developed through drone surveys were crucial visual tools for such community-level consultations. The municipal governments then collated the identified needs to obtain infrastructure gap assessment profiles for each slum before issuing work orders.

After the basic services are provided, the SDAs can apply to the municipal bodies to have their clusters delisted as slums and to achieve equal treatment with other residential areas. The SDAs are also allowed to rename their areas to avoid social stigma associated with slums. Thus, by institutionalising the role of the SDAs in the decision-making hierarchy of urban governance, the Jaga Mission has innovatively strengthened participatory planning practices and empowered people at the margins of society.

Innovation 3: Slum upgrading as a livelihood support mechanism

In addition to providing tenure security and improving liveability conditions in the slum habitats, another key objective of the Odisha government was to provide livelihood support to the urban poor engaged in the informal economy. Here, in an innovative governance intervention, the Jaga Mission was designed to have synergy with Shakti Mission, a long-standing programme focusing on poverty eradication. The Shakti Mission programme organises poor women into neighbourhood-based Self-Help Groups for micro-entrepreneurial activities and has over the years become a pivot for grass-roots social empowerment.

The policy template created to engage the urban poor in small-scale construction activities became useful in scaling up welfare benefits during the Covid-19 crisis. Large numbers of people from Odisha who had been working in the informal economies of big cities such as Mumbai, Delhi, Surat, and Bangalore faced acute livelihood vulnerabilities when lockdowns were imposed and began returning to their home state in March 2020. Based on the experience gained through the Jaga Mission, the Odisha government immediately launched an innovative scheme called the Urban Wage Employment Initiative. Municipal governments in the state began to engage the returning migrant workers in a variety of labour-intensive low-skill civil works, such as road building, digging of drainage channels, etc. Thus, Jaga Mission made slum upgrading a model for employment generation through public works for disaster recovery.¹²

Take away lessons

Odisha's innovative approach to improving living conditions of the urban poor through the Jaga Mission shows how a diverse set of developmental objectives can be dovetailed into an integrated city-based planning strategy and implemented through a multi-level governance framework. The programme offers several lessons in slum upgrading that reflect the impact of a collaborative, people-centric and data-driven approach toward urban governance.

1. **Collaborative planning.** The New Urban Agenda has placed significant importance on multi-level collaboration to address pressing urban challenges as city governments in many developing countries lack capacities. The innovative institutional mechanism of the Jaga Mission can show a way forward on how to implement collaborative planning in a multi-level, multi-stakeholder environment. The Jaga Mission put in place a collaborative decision-making mechanism, which on the one hand helped facilitate policy co-ordination across both different levels of government and between government and non-profit organisations. Small and medium-sized towns of Odisha, as is often the case in the Global South, have poor fiscal conditions and face acute capacity deficits. In the case of the Jaga Mission, the state government's Housing and Urban Development Department provided centralised leadership and simultaneously rolled the scheme out in 109 cities. Financial constraints were overcome by leveraging funds from different welfare programmes run by the national government and the state government ministries. Local-level policy integration was carried out by the municipal governments. Human resource capacity deficiencies were overcome by building partnerships with NGOs and community-based organisations.
2. **People-centric approach.** Whereas many cities in the Global South have undertaken ambitious slum redevelopment projects to free up prime urban land for high-value real estate investment, the Jaga Mission has taken a strong pro-poor, welfare-driven approach. The key components of the Mission, security of land tenure and in-situ basic infrastructure upgrades, are designed for the socio-economic upliftment of people, not commercial gain. Moreover, the Mission was a step in the direction of improving the

livelihoods of people on the margins by engaging the SDAs and the SHGs in construction activities. This initiative was expanded later to provide jobs to people in distress during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Jaga Mission has significantly empowered the urban poor by institutionalising the roles of SDAs in the local governance frameworks. Thus, the Jaga Mission is not just a one-time slum upgrading activity, but a long-term commitment toward inclusive urbanisation and empowerment.

3. **Data-driven governance.** Developmental schemes for targeting slums and informal settlements frequently face operational challenges due to data inadequacies. From the beginning, the Jaga Mission emphasised building a robust data infrastructure for objective decision-making. While the application of drone technology made it possible to quickly obtain high-quality geospatial data for all slum areas of the state, subsequent ground-level data validation exercises involving local people and community-based organisations helped achieve a high degree of transparency in determining property boundaries. At a later stage, detailed slum-level base maps became effective tools for communication with the local communities for the transparent planning of public spaces and infrastructure networks. The innovative data management protocol of the Jaga Mission can be helpful for other cities in planning infrastructure upgrades in informal settlements.

In conclusion, the Jaga Mission shows how a relatively underdeveloped state can undertake significant slum uplifting initiatives through innovative urban governance and resource mobilization strategies. Participatory slum upgrading is a key target under the SDG framework (SDG 11.1.1), while the New Urban Agenda emphasises a multi-level approach to meeting core urban challenges through the National Urban Policy framework. Thus, the key takeaways from the Mission regarding data-driven, people-centric, and collaborative governance can be useful for developing Asian, African, and Latin American countries to achieve progress towards SDG targets.