

BReUCom Webinar Series

WEBINAR REPORT

PUTTING INFORMALITY AT THE CENTRE OF CITY RESILIENCE

Saturday, 21 August 2021
11.00 am to 1.30 pm (Indian Time)

Organised by



B_RE_U_COM
Building Resilient Urban Communities



SPEAKER PROFILES

Prof. Chetan Vaidya is an Architect-Planner with over 30-year long academic, research and consultancy experience of urban development. In 2015, IIT Kharagpur recognized him as distinguished alumni. He was Director of the School of Planning and Architecture (SPA) New Delhi during 2012-17 and was also Director of National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA) during 2008-12.

Ms. Barsha Poricha, is the Technical Head at Centre for Urban and Regional Excellence (CURE). She is an urban and regional planner from CEPT, Ahmedabad with a PhD in Human Ecology from Ambedkar University, Delhi. Over the last two decades, she has been working on issues of civil society engagement and human development and her work particularly has been around engaging, developing, and designing inclusive and participatory planning and development mechanisms within governance processes. She also works on issues of gender, youth development and capacity building to influence and deepen policy discourse and strengthen people engagement in the urban sector.

Dr. Manish Sharma is the Assistant Professor in the School of Architecture and Design at Manipal University Jaipur. He is an Architect from MNIT Jaipur and Urban & Rural Planner from IIT Roorkee and has recently completed his doctoral study with Urban water resilience as research area. He is a recipient of two international scholarships during his Master and doctoral study. His research interest includes urban resilience, urban utilities, and urban water, specific to developing nations. He is currently working as an Assistant Professor at School of Architecture and Design, Manipal University Jaipur.

Ms. Sheela Patel is the founder Director of the Society for Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC), an NGO that supports community organizations of the urban poor to access secure housing and basic amenities and seek their right to the city. She is a founder member and former Chair of the Board of Slum Dwellers International (SDI), an international network of urban poor federations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. She is also a Commissioner on the Global Commission for Adaptation (GCA).

Dr. Madhura Yadav is an Architect-Planner with over 25 -year experience. She is Director of the School Architecture & Design at Manipal University Jaipur. She is/was on several Committee/Expert Groups set up by Government of India., She is on Jury of various Architectural competition. She is also on Editorial Board Architecture, Urban Design and Urban Planning India Journals. She has published number of papers in national and international journals and conferences. She is UNESCO certified Mentor for Community based participatory research. She is Indian Green Building Accredited Professional. She has conducted workshops on Bamboo Architecture. Her current research interests are Architecture- Ecology interface and Eco- cities, Promotion of eco materials and Community Based Participatory Research.

Dr. Anshu Sharma, is trained as an urban planner at the School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi, and did his doctoral research in global environmental studies at Kyoto University. In 1994, he co-founded the civil society organisation SEEDS, which has been working across Asia towards building disaster and climate resilience in vulnerable communities and has been responding to disasters with shelter and school reconstruction programmes. He has worked over 30 major disasters across the region. His current interests revolve around the interface of science, people, and policy.

Ar Bibhu Kalyan Nayak is Assistant Professor in the School of Architecture and Design at Manipal University Jaipur. He teaches history to students of Architecture & Basic Planning Techniques.

Dr. Rajesh Tandon is an internationally acclaimed leader and practitioner of participatory research and development. He is Founder-President of Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), global centre for participatory research & training since 1982. He has been appointed Co-Chair of the prestigious UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education for three terms (2012 – 2016, 2016 – 2020 and 2020-2024). Electronics engineer from IIT, Kanpur, MBA from IIM Calcutta, and Ph.D. in Management from Case Western Reserve University USA. Dr. Tandon has served on numerous expert committees of Government of India, UGC, UN, Commonwealth & World Bank. A pioneer of participatory research, he has given new meaning to academic research by redefining the relationship between the researcher and the researched.

KEY MESSAGES

- There is a need to influence formal institutions and agencies for including the concepts of informal sector and resilience into the education through the model curriculum.
- A mix of bottom-up and top-down approaches should be used to deal with the distress between local governments and communities. There should be a platform for inclusive participation in terms of resources, functions, technical inputs, budgets, etc.
- HEI's and CSO's need to empower, strengthen the capacities, and invest in the understanding of communities by sharing information.
- A robust community engagement and representation of informal sector strategies need to be designed for inclusive participation. The solutions must come from slum dwellers, from informal workers and their ability to demonstrate their aggregated, alternative mechanisms is going to be the crucial in this transformation.
- In educational institutions and consequently in practice, slum dwellers are not seen as clients, they are seen as beneficiaries which affects the quality of urban slum related policies and practices.
- HEI's need to focus on teaching empathy, communication with urban informal and collaboration with them is critical for developing responsible, sensitised professionals.
- A lateral connection between various disciplines in HEIs, incorporating multi-scale approach and field trips for teaching and learning needs to be established. Undergraduate, post graduate and Ph.D. students must be able to conduct research in an interconnected manner, where they can collaborate to collect and analyse data.

THE DISCUSSION

Cities across India have been experiencing a rise in urban poor living in informal settlements, along with the increase in the extent of informality in urban employment which is as high as 70 per cent (Chen and Raveendran, 2012)^[1]. Most people living in the informal settlements face multiple vulnerabilities due to inadequate access to basic services (housing, roads, water, sanitation, etc.), frequent climate events, and many more. These vulnerabilities exacerbate for people living in settlements located in areas that are more prone to natural hazards, such as slopes and riverbanks, or near industries and dump sites. Studies have indicated the gendered impact of climate change, wherein women informal workers and women living in informal settlements are disproportionately affected during such unusual events.

City resilience is viewed as a step forward for protecting the urban poor from these challenges, along with improving the lives of the next generation of the urban inhabitants. A resilient city is defined as the capacity of individuals, communities, institutions, businesses, and systems within a city to survive, adapt, and grow no matter what kinds of chronic stresses and acute shocks they experience (100 Resilient Cities). However, to make cities resilient, it is important to acknowledge

the needs of those in the most vulnerable situations by integrating informality. The concept and ideology of informality has taken a spot back in the agenda of urban planning, where various policies and initiatives are being pursued to manage to manage informality. Roy (2009) discusses informality in terms of the two-fold condition of what is legal and illegal, authorized, and unauthorised, and, legitimate and, illegitimate. Whereas, in the urban context informality can be understood from multiple frames such as, spatial categorisation (slum), socio-economic groups (informalised labour), forms of organisation (rule-based/relation-based), and knowledge and practices.

The Indian government has carried forward several urban development schemes to promote infrastructural development and sustainability of urbanisation. Many of these schemes emphasise on top-down categorisation of community needs including public transportation, housing, streetlights, roads and reducing pollution, rather than on social vulnerabilities of informal dwellers. In the context of understanding these vulnerabilities, it's important to note the different layers of complexities according to geographic and socio-economic factors and experiences acquired through each climatic event. Due to the informal nature of these settlements, residents are less likely to access basic services such as sanitation, clean water, and public transport. This negatively impacts their capacities to withstand climate change impacts as envisioned by policy makers. As a result, people survive disasters and crises by adapting through locally designed strategies, which form important starting points for any risk assessment.

The question that arises is how can government measures address the needs of informal settlements which are at the core of the climate resilience? It is becoming increasingly clear that giving voice to people living in informal settlements in relation to urban development and planning can contribute towards building collective, sustainable, and inclusive resilience. Understanding existing local coping strategies, their scale, and nature has been highlighted by different scholars to support initiatives that build resilience at grassroots levels to develop adaptation plans.

With the growing need to embed informality at the heart of city resilience and the urban discourse, various institutions including academic institutions can play an instrumental role in supporting this approach. Higher education institutions can develop research-based resilience building solutions to cities across India alongside, partnerships between community and institutions can be built to understand the informality from different disciplines and create robust community engagement interventions.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are increasingly being important stakeholders to foster community-engaged approaches for building climate resilience locally, through incorporation of such approaches in teaching and research across field disciplines. To have deeper discussions about the role of higher education institutions in synergising urban planning and development for building climate and community resilience, as well as ways in which values of equity and social justice influence and shape climate strategies, Manipal University Jaipur, Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), and Building Resilient Urban Communities (BReUCom) initiative hosted a webinar on **“Putting Informality at the Centre of City Resilience”** on Saturday, 21 August 2021 (11.00 am to 01.15 pm).

The webinar addressed the following questions:

1. *How can urban informality be included in the resilience planning for cities?*
2. *How can the partnerships among urban informal community, local governance and other stakeholders be enhanced for building resilience?*

3. *What role can academic and higher education institutions play in integrating urban informality in city resilience planning?*

PANEL DISCUSSION

Moderator - Prof. (Dr.) Madhura Yadav, Director, School of Architecture and Design, Manipal University Jaipur

The webinar began with a short overview on the topic **Putting Informality at the Centre of City Resilience** by Dr. Yadav and was followed by reflections from Prof. Chetan Vaidya.

Prof. Chetan Vaidya started the discussion by sharing the interlinkages between the three complex institutions and concepts - informal sector, resilience, and higher education. Sometimes the higher education is guided by professional practice, and other times the professional practice is guided by higher education agenda. However, in India, it is usually the professional practice, which guides higher education.

Urban planning must be sustainable and inclusive to deal with the informal sector. Academicians, urban practitioners, among others are not equipped with the tools and skills for addressing informality within the planning framework. The issues and concerns of informal sector are not addressed by the national guidelines as well. However, it needs to be inculcated within national and regional guidelines based on data and experience. He further stressed the need to view slums as solutions for safe equitable permanent, and rental housing. Dr. Vaidya concluded his discussion by proposing the following recommendations:

1. The informal sector should be commercially viable.
2. There is a need for strong and local governance structures. For example, Kerala Local Government
3. Investment in research, documentation, data-based, and sharing is an important concern.
4. The Higher Education Institution's curriculum is guided by various institutions. There is a need to influence formal institutions and agencies to include the concepts informal sector and resilience into the education through a model curriculum.
5. There is a lot of distress among local governments and communities. A mix of bottom-up and top-down approaches should be used to deal with the same. There should be a platform for inclusive participation in terms of resources, functions, technical inputs, budgets, etc.

Dr. Barsha Poricha gave a brief overview of the Building Resilient Urban Communities (**BREUCOM**) project. It was conceptualized and implemented by six Indian partners and two European partners to equip the Indian Higher Education Institutions to respond to emerging resilience challenges. The project was supported by the European Union under its Erasmus+ Programme for Capacity Building in Higher Education. The project started in January 2019, has contributed to developing several case studies and Professional Development Programmes (PDPs) by the academic partners. BReUCOM has hence helped bridge the gap between planning and architecture training to working environments to understand and react sensitively to community needs and partnerships.

To have a deeper conversation around informality and resilient planning, Dr. Poricha shared two case studies conducted as part of the BReUCOM.

Resilience of a Historic Native Town: Case Study Kalbadevi, Bohra Bazaar, Mumbai - The study intended to identify inherent resilience of the historic urban communities and develop models to further strengthen them based on the values, interests, and aspirations of various stakeholders. It further aimed to update and enrich the base data of the housing and livelihood conditions.

Climate-resilient adaptation of built form in hilly region through traditional wisdom and best practices: A case of Himachal Pradesh - This was a detailed study of traditional settlements in the hilly region of Dharamshala and aimed to reveal the reasons on how the traditional buildings and settlements have been able to survive the impacts of disasters in the long run that resulted in their heritage status. The study explored the new and old viewpoints of the cases of the Dharamshala region with relation to the design of traditional buildings and historic settlements that are sophisticated with traditional patterns, limited materials, and technologies of the past.

Lastly, drawing from her experience of working with CSO sector, Dr Poricha, stressed on the need to empower, strengthen the capacities, and invest in the understanding of communities by sharing information. This will can help in the development of partnerships between communities and city-level government.

Dr Manish Shrama, speaking from his experience of working on the issue of urban resilience and specifically for water-based sector, Dr, Manish shared about the emerging realities of urban informality. Climate Adaptation and Disaster Resilience are the two most important areas that require attention. There are a couple of ways that can lead to the inclusion of urban informality in the resilience planning of the cities. Firstly, communities can be made resilient for example, Japan, as a country has built capacities of the local community by increasing their level of resilience. Secondly, mapping of informality should be the basis for proposing any kind of intervention. There is limited literature available to understand the issue of urban informality. Thirdly, there is a need to have robust community engagement and representation of informal sector strategies so that the voices of urban informal are heard and acknowledged. Lastly, coordination between local governments along with mapping ways in which services can be provided in a decentralized manner is very critical.

This panel discussion was followed by a roundtable discussion.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

Chair and Moderator, Dr. Rajesh Tandon introduced the speakers and set the stage for the discussion. During the Pandemic, the only economy that worked was the informal economy. Urbanisation taking place around the world is also fuelling urban economy. Informal economy is an integral part of India's reality, more so in urban centres than anywhere else. Moreover, it is not homogenous informality but instead takes many forms. Therefore, the question arises that to take climate change seriously, the way we design, plan, and operate our cities must be rethought because resilience in urban context is far more problematic than resilience in the rural context. He urged speakers to reflect on how professional education can be transformed for those who are responsible for planning, development, and management of urban habitations.

Dr Anshu Sharma by questioning people's understanding of the informal sector and of resilience. When we speak of resilience, we think of floods, cyclones, and major pandemics. But the high impact, low frequency events like Dengue get missed out in the process. Looking at the 7000 small and medium towns in the country instead of the metros, one finds that dengue is a built environment issue, not just a public health issue. The medical professionals respond to the threat,

the municipalities do maintenance in terms of cleaning the drains but what about low-lying cities and towns where those drains are not yet built, and where water logging frequently takes place? The role here is of the planner and architect, not just the health professionals. Almost all health-related problems and health related impacts of disasters are rooted in the built environment.

Dr. Sharma then spoke in terms of being consumers of products that are churned out by educational institutions. In educational institutions and consequently in practice, slum dwellers are not seen as clients, they are seen as beneficiaries which affects the quality and thinking that goes behind urban slum related policies and practices. The second issue is to do with budgeting; questions about how much budget can be allotted by the municipal authority, what returns will the money spent give in terms of social returns on investment are not taught to professionals in institutes of planning and architecture. Third, in terms of technology, master plans for the urban centres try envisaging the state of the centre for the next 20 years, while live apps today can track several dimensions on weekly basis. With these thoughts on ethics and economics of the practice, Dr. Sharma ended his presentation.

Ar. Bibhu K. Nayak began by pointing out that informality is the reason we have all the luxuries in our lives. Teaching this aspect in a structured environment in higher education institutions (HEIs) is very difficult. When we speak of informality, it is cross disciplinary and therefore flexibility is needed to integrate it in several subject lines. Secondly, there is a lack of opportunity for these graduates to become social entrepreneurs. This responsibility to a large extent lies with Higher Education Institutions, because they fail to motivate young minds to branch out into social entrepreneurship. Third if the role of HEIs is to train students to develop their own perspectives, and if we want to sensitise them about informality, then teaching empathy, communication with urban informals and collaboration with them is critical for developing responsible, sensitised professionals. These capacities can be built by a 'learning by doing approach' which will help these professionals to develop a connect with urban informals who they can work with as partners. Finally labelling them as 'informal' has a negative connotation and we must find an alternative name to refer to these critical sections of people.

Ms Sheela Patel began with a radical alternative view, stating that pretending to call informal workers something else will not change their reality. She argued that we have consolidated historical exclusionary practices in sophisticated formal systems that our present educational system deepens. We must acknowledge that formal, northern exclusionary practices, creating cities for extrapolation of resources, depleting ownership and access to services have been entrenched and legitimized in post- colonial education systems. Planners and architects are the easiest people to punch because they remain at the centre of legally framing these exclusionary practices. If we start with the awareness that young professionals today have very few financially viable opportunities in the social development sector, we can then work backwards to fill the gaps. In the context of climate and resilience, our cities are going to be the largest areas of crisis, because they are designed, and investments are made in unrealistic and indefensible ways. Therefore, the impact of the carbon emissions, their inability to deal with extreme heat and cold, rain and wind will influence everyone. The next ten years will exacerbate migration to cities and 95% of them will further densify the formal settlements. Ms Patel stated that time for light house and pilot projects is gone, and what we need to question the larger framework to see how that can transform the stark crisis that we are facing. The solutions must come from slum dwellers, from informal workers and their ability to demonstrate their aggregated, alternative mechanisms is going to be the crucial in this transformation. What must also be recognised is that while what informal workers in vulnerable communities do to survive is often termed as resilience, this depleted all the minimal resources they had, and they become trapped in this myth of marginality. Unless

educational institutions, local authorities, and informal settlements have a long term, multi-decadal relationship to find solutions, there is no other way to change anything.

Prof. (Dr.) Madhura Yadav began by emphasizing on importance of understanding complexities surrounding informal settlements and the socio-economic and cultural factors that affect their lives and livelihoods. First, we need to establish a lateral connection between subjects in HEIs, incorporating multi-scale approach and field trips in teaching and learning processes. Undergraduate, post graduate and Ph.D. students must be able to conduct research in an interconnected manner, where they can collaborate to collect and analyse data. Through joint field studies, thematic design or planning studios, a developed program can be made which can then be the foundation for future research. Understanding key dimensions of informality such as public space, urban morphology and place identity is particularly at stake where most literature on formal urbanism needs to valorise at the macro scale.

Dr. Poricha stated that often relationship between HEIs and Civil Society Organisations is need based in a limited framework. Where there is relationship and collaboration between the two which entails structure and respect, and an understanding that theory informs practice and practice informs theory. The second issue is creating a space for dissent, to put forth views in a constructive manner to the local body and governance systems which is missing now. Ms Sheela Patel gave an example of Kenya, where the government of Kenya gave the residents of Mukuru and the federation part of SDI the right to design an SPA for Mukuru, the largest informal settlements in Nairobi. In the last two years with the help of many NGOs and planners, communities collected data and produced a plan that has been accepted by Nairobi City Council. The project is being endorsed by the President, who is accordingly building roads, sewer systems and organizing health services. The reason for this is that for the first time, the documentation showed that the informal settlement is an integral part of the city and the longer you take to make investments in informal settlements, the more expensive it gets and that it was in fact a long-term investment towards helping the city itself.

Prof Vaidya asked a critical question about whether in the coming days, will higher education change the profession or will the profession change higher education. He also stated that planning studios that exist in HEIs is where all theories should be integrated to get a practical understanding of concepts. Dr. Tandon finally gave three interesting takeaways. First, planning is expected to serve a common goal. Planning to serve integrated formality and defining it in an everyday sense requires granular data owing to changing nature of cities and towns. All plans given reality of urban informality needs to be reviewed by considering decentralised, local, and contextual solutions. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 blesses engaged teaching, multi-disciplinarity and promotes actionable research. One idea inherent to the Policy is that there are multiple knowledge systems and experiential knowledge is also valuable knowledge. If informal workers in urban centres are treated as beneficiaries, their knowledge is not treated as valuable. Only when we value people's knowledge can we build ownership amongst them.

Ms. Minali Banerjee gave the vote of thanks.