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Communication and participation challenges in precarious settlements restructuring projects: experiences in Delhi and other Indian cities

Véronique Dupont

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Rethinking Precarious Neighborhoods

Scientific Editor: Agnès Deboulet

Rethinking Precarious Neighborhoods

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Table of contents

| | |
|--|---|
| Acknowledgements..... | 3 |
| List of contributors..... | 5 |
| Introduction, Rethinking precarious neighborhoods. Knowledge and recognition..... | 9 |
| <i>Agnès DEBOULET</i> | |

PART ONE:

Precarious neighborhoods: building a social fact, a paradigm, and critical feedback

| | |
|---|----|
| Rethinking precarious neighborhoods: concepts and consequences of marginality | 39 |
| <i>Janice PERLMAN</i> | |
| Finding a place in the city: low-income housing sub-markets revisited..... | 57 |
| <i>David SATTERTHWAITÉ</i> | |
| The favelas of Rio de Janeiro: at the margin of the city, at the margin of history? | 75 |
| <i>Rafael SOARES GONÇALVES</i> | |
| Informality as exception: case studies from Beirut | 87 |
| <i>Mona FAWAZ</i> | |

PART TWO:

Security of land tenure and housing markets: experiences, failures and learnings

| | |
|--|-----|
| An outcry against informality. The impact of land on the treatment of precarious settlements, as spaces of political competition : Cambodia, Syria, Lebanon..... | 105 |
| <i>Valérie CLERC</i> | |
| Informality, renting and housing in the Global South..... | 119 |
| <i>Alan GILBERT</i> | |
| Improving informal settlements in Senegal: the end of slums in sight? | 135 |
| <i>Serigne Mansour TALL</i> | |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Spatial informality in the Global South: new challenges for service provision and neighbourhood improvement initiatives..... | 147 |
| <i>Diana MITLIN</i> | |
| Normalizing and regularizing slums: What explains the sidelining of onsite interventions in Europe? Comparing Paris and Madrid. | 161 |
| <i>Thomas AGUILERA</i> | |

PART THREE:
Collective mobilization: knowledge and learnings

| | |
|--|------------|
| Communication and participation challenges in precarious settlement restructuring projects. Experiences in Delhi and other Indian cities..... | 179 |
| <i>Véronique DUPONT</i> | |
| Informal settlements at the intersection between urban planning and rights: advances through judicialisation in the South African case..... | 195 |
| <i>Marie HUCHZERMEYER</i> | |
| From slum to an ordinary neighborhood in a provincial town of South India: resident-induced practices of participation and co-production. | 211 |
| <i>Bhuvaneswari RAMAN, Éric DENIS, Solomon BENJAMIN</i> | |
| Pedagogy for “real change” – The DPU/ACHR partnership | 233 |
| <i>Barbara LIPIETZ, Caroline NEWTON</i> | |
| Conclusion, Rethinking precarious neighborhoods, rethinking the future city ... | 245 |
| <i>Armelle CHOPLIN</i> | |

Communication and participation challenges in precarious settlement restructuring projects. Experiences in Delhi and other Indian cities

Véronique DUPONT^[1]

Introduction

Citizen participation has long been debated in academic circles (Arnstein, 1969). The principle of participation as a guarantee of good governance has also become prevalent in the discourse and recommendations of international development institutions (Christens *et al.*, 2006). Likewise, it is enshrined in the international conventions on the right to adequate housing, which lay particular emphasis on the need to inform the affected persons and groups in reasonable time in the event of the eviction and displacement of populations, as well as on the need to hold extensive consultations in which all stakeholders take part.^[2] The slum clearance policies and programs launched in India since the 1990s also highlight, to varying degrees, the principle of “community” participation.

To begin with, we will analyze how the involvement of affected residents is provided for in national policy documents on slums, and in programs launched by the states of the Indian Union since the 1990s, especially in Mumbai (formerly Bombay) and Delhi. Second, drawing on case studies in Delhi and Chennai (formerly Madras), we will look at how the principle of

[1] **Acknowledgements.** This chapter is based on research carried out in two collective projects: (i) the SETUP project (“Social exclusion, territories and urban policies. A comparison between India and Brazil”) funded by the French National Research Agency (Agence nationale de la recherche – ANR) from 2007 to 2010, and (ii) Chance2Sustain (Urban Chances – city growth and the sustainability challenge) funded by the European Commission (FP7 – 7th framework programme for research and innovation) from 2010 to 2014. I should also mention the financial support from the French National Institute of Research for Sustainable Development (Institut de Recherche pour le Développement – IRD). For my research stays in Delhi, I received institutional and logistical support from the Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities, and the Centre for Policy Research (CPR). Site surveys at V.P. Singh Camp and Kathputli Colony in Delhi were conducted in collaboration with Shankare Gowda, and surveys in Chennai (formerly Madras) with R. Dhanalakshmi. The Kathputli Colony study also led to collaboration with CPR researchers and a first joint publication (Dupont, Banda, Vaidya and Gowda, 2014), some elements of which are included in this chapter.

[2] See United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comments No. 4: *The Right to Adequate Housing* (1991) and General Comments No. 7: *The Right to Adequate Housing* (1997).

participation is implemented on the ground by examining slum demolition operations, and rehabilitation^[3] or relocation projects.

The participation process covers various levels of community involvement. Arnstein (1969) arranged these into a citizen participation ladder with different degrees of power-sharing. Here, our analysis will focus on two of the lower rungs of participation ladder identified by Arnstein: informing and consulting citizens, in this case slum dwellers. As shown by other experiences in restructuring informal settlements (Deboulet, 2007; Jordhus-Lier *et al.*, 2016), the key requirements for any form of effective participation are certainly the provision of detailed and comprehensive information to residents, as well as two-way communication.

So why does participation matter? It is argued that if the principle of effective participation were applied to slum dwellers, then their voices and needs would be better taken into account, and projects would thus be better adapted and taken on board by the residents. For societies with high levels of social-economic inequality, participation is advocated by some authors as a means of strengthening democracy, of bridging the gap between legal and formal rights on the one hand, and substantive rights on the other (Heller, 2009). However, the “participation” watchword is not immune to manipulation by the State or other actors, who may be concealing power relations behind the rhetoric and techniques of participation and using the cloak of popular consent to pursue their own agendas (Cooke *et al.*, 2001).

The term “slum” nonetheless needs to be clarified upfront. In India, housing policy documents and urban plans use the term “slum,” which encompasses at the same time old dilapidated quarters and informal housing settlements occupying land illegally, otherwise referred to as squatter settlements or *jhuggi-jhopri* clusters (groups of shacks) in Delhi. Here, we focus on the second category, i.e., informal settlements where physically precarious housing, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of basic urban services combine with a precarious tenure status, all of which exacerbate the vulnerability of slum dwellers.

1. Policies on slums: the general principles

India has ratified almost all the international conventions on human rights, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which lays down the right to adequate housing, and calls for the participation of the populations concerned. While compliance with these conventions still has a long way to go (Kothari, 2003), they nonetheless provide instruments of international law and a legal framework that can be leveraged by organizations defending the right to housing in India (HLRN, 2009).

The principle of participation is also foregrounded in sundry slum policy documents, both at the level of individual states and national level. We first explore the case of Mumbai due

[3] In India, slum upgrading projects entailing demolition of existing buildings and the construction of new dwellings are dubbed “in-situ rehabilitation.”

to its bellwether role in slum rehabilitation programs, which have to some extent inspired national policy. We then present the two most recent national strategies, before going on to examine the case of Delhi in more detail. The situation in the nation's capital is singular: central Government maintains control over land and urban policy through its dedicated agency, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), whereas elsewhere these responsibilities fall within the competency of the federal States.^[4]

1.1. *Mumbai, pioneering the participatory approach*

In Mumbai, the participatory approach used in slum rehabilitation schemes was introduced in the 2000s, under tripartite partnerships between the Maharashtra State Government, civil society organizations, and the private sector (which has been involved in these schemes since the 1990s). The NGOs, which initially stepped in to redress government shortcomings in the delivery of urban services and to help slum dwellers resist demolitions and access better resettlement conditions, subsequently got involved as developers in rehousing programs.

A key component of the policy pursued in Mumbai is its consent clause: "in-situ rehabilitation"^[5] schemes thus require the prior consent of at least 70% of the eligible slum dwellers, who need to be organized into co-operative housing societies.^[6] Certainly, requiring consent does not in itself guarantee meaningful participation, and could lead to various coercive practices (Weinstein, 2008). However, according to the residents and organizations fighting for the right to housing, the Mumbai experience shows that the consent clause does act as a "democratic check" on the state agency in charge of slum rehabilitation programs (Weinstein, 2009: 411).

Some instances of participatory resettlement highlight the reshuffling of roles between public bodies and civil society organizations: the latter have a crucial involvement in partnerships while the State plays the role of facilitator – a configuration defended by some activists (Patel, D’Cruz, and Burra, 2002). However, "the participatory approach is not an instant fix and takes long to take root and be effective, especially in a large heterogeneous population and with divergent interests" (Banerjee, 2010, section 2.2: 5). Furthermore, in this type of NGO intervention model, there is a risk of blurring the roles of the different stakeholders in slum rehabilitation or resettlement programs, and of introducing new vested interests (Dewan Verma, 2002). Besides, NGOs do not always have the necessary resources and skills to take on the increased responsibilities assigned to them. This problem was highlighted by the Inspection Panel of the World Bank concerning the implementation of resettlement programs under the Mumbai Urban Transport Project (World Bank Inspection Panel, 2005).

[4] In fact, even though the National Capital Territory of Delhi has had an elected assembly and government since 1991, it does not possess all the powers of a federal State.

[5] Projects in India designated as "in-situ rehabilitation" involve the demolition of existing buildings and construction of new housing.

[6] Source: Slum Rehabilitation Authority: <http://www.sra.gov.in/pgeSalientFeatures.aspx> (last consulted 02/10/2016).

1.2. National strategies

A national strategy for “slum-free city planning” was announced in 2009 with the *Rajiv Awas Yojana* (RAY) program^[7] in operation until June 2015 (GOI, 2010). Although this strategy made no outright reference to the international “Cities without Slums” initiatives promoted by the World Bank (World Bank, 2000) and UN-Habitat (UN-Habitat, 2003), it echoed them obliquely. Its action plan prioritized in-situ upgrading and rehabilitation programs, including access to ownership rights, while programs to relocate slum dwellers to alternative sites were to be limited to those slums whose situation was classed as “untenable,” notably due to environmental risks (GOI, 2010). The strategy advocated a public-private partnership model for the construction of low-income housing. Lastly, “community” participation was made a prerequisite: for each slum identified, the decision-making process regarding its redevelopment “should necessarily be done with the involvement of the community” (*ibid.*: 5) and “with the assistance from Lead NGOs/CBOs^[8]” (*ibid.*: 18). Detailed guidelines for each step were issued to this end (GOI, 2012).

However, regarding the residents’ consent, the national strategy did not go as far as the schemes implemented in Mumbai. For the RAY program mentioned above, a draft model bill of property rights to the slum dwellers was published to provide the federal States with a template on which to base their own legislation on slum rehabilitation and resettlement (GOI, 2011). Until May 2011, this model had stipulated that any rehabilitation or resettlement project required the consent of “a majority of adult slum dwellers.”^[9] The revised model introduced in November 2011 merely stated that slum dwellers should be “involved.”^[10]

Following the change of government in May 2014, the RAY program was discontinued. A new national housing scheme, *Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana*,^[11] was launched in June 2015 under the slogan “Housing for All by 2022.” Its first component, in-situ slum rehabilitation, reprises principles identical to those set out in the previous program regarding private-sector participation in housing construction for the slum dwellers and the use of land as a resource (GOI, 2015: 2-3). In practical terms, only part of the land occupied by the slum is used for the construction of dwellings to rehouse the residents. The rest of the land freed up is turned over to the private developer to build residential or commercial property to be sold on the market at a profit, with part of the proceeds from the sale helping to fund low-income housing.

As for resident participation, the guidelines state: “Slum dwellers through their association or other suitable means should be consulted while formulating redevelopment projects, especially for the purpose of designing of slum rehabilitation component” (*ibid.*: 4). So far, no mention has been made of a residents consent clause.

[7] The Rajiv housing programme, in reference to former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

[8] CBO: community-based organization.

[9] Information provided by Subhadra Banda.

[10] See: <http://indiancities.berkeley.edu/2012/docs/Mathur-draftmodelprprightslumdwelers.pdf> (website page downloaded 04/02/2014).

[11] Namely, the Prime Minister housing scheme.

1.3. The participation component in policies for squatter settlements in Delhi

From the 1960s until 2010, the main strategy used in Delhi to deal with the question of squatter settlements was to evict the residents and relocate them to resettlement colonies on the city periphery under sites-and-services schemes, where plots were theoretically supplied with infrastructure and basic services, but with no rehousing or rebuilding assistance. According to the policy adopted by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi from 1990 to 2010, squatter settlements located on public land (almost all of it in the capital) were – in principle – only to be demolished to make way for projects implemented in the “larger public interest” (GNCTD, 1999). Moreover, according to court directives, in the event of eviction, residents must be notified one month in advance.

1.3.1. NGO involvement since the 1990s

There have been several attempts to involve NGOs in the implementation of squatter resettlement programs, the first dating back to 1990. In line with the strategy defined in official documents (GNCTD, 1999), resettlement was to be organized around multi-purpose cooperative societies set up by NGOs. Forty NGOs were selected for this purpose by the Slum and *Jhuggi Jhopri* Department within the Municipal Corporation of Delhi. These NGOs were tasked with conducting a socio-economic survey of the targeted slums and establishing a list of families eligible for resettlement – a list that was to be checked and approved by the Slum Department. Entrusting NGOs with this level of responsibility gave them considerable power. On the one hand, it enabled them to prevent fraud by municipal officials and ensure that all eligible families actually had access to a plot in the resettlement colonies. Their intervention also helped avoid police violence during evictions. On the other hand, this devolution of power gave some NGOs the opportunity to engage in the misappropriation of resettlement plots.^[12] In the end, most of the NGOs initially involved withdrew from the program as payment of most of the budget they had been promised was not forthcoming. Furthermore, the functioning of the cooperative societies was blocked as the government failed to appoint the mandatory official representatives required for managing these societies.^[13]

From 2000 to 2013, the Bhagidari scheme – a government-citizen partnership – was the dominant paradigm adopted by the then chief minister of Delhi. At the outset, the scheme only targeted authorized colonies with duly registered resident welfare associations, which meant that squatter settlements were automatically excluded. The principle of the scheme nonetheless influenced public interventions in slums. New schemes involving NGOs were launched, with a focus on service provision.

Another flagship program, Mission Convergence, launched in 2008 by the Government of Delhi to reach the most disadvantaged social groups, was based on a partnership between

[12] Source: interview with a social worker who witnessed such malpractices (December 2009).

[13] Source: interviews with the General Secretary and Chairman of two NGOs involved in the program (14/12/2009 and 21/12/2009 respectively).

the public sector, the private sector and the “communities,” with the active participation of NGOs. Other more recent schemes have sought to bolster the participation of NGOs and CBOs in slums and resettlement colonies. Pilot projects were also launched in 2011 by the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board^[14] to conduct socio-economic surveys and improve living conditions in some of the slums. However, most of the schemes launched over the last fifteen years have been discontinued.

These forms of NGO participation within “invited spaces” (Cornwall, 2001; Miraftab, 2004), on terms and conditions set by public authorities, have come in for criticism from some activists.^[15] They view this type of participation as contributing to a process of government co-optation, a strategy to control opposition groups by delegating to NGOs activities that formerly fell within the public sector remit – the expected effect being to stifle dissident voices. The debate is inconclusive as to what benefits this “invited” involvement is likely to bring to residents, compared to a confrontational strategy and the mobilization of demands within “invented spaces” (Miraftab, 2004) controlled by the grassroots.

1.3.2. The Delhi Development Authority’s strategy since the late 2000s

The Delhi Development Authority (DDA), Delhi’s urban planning agency, also elaborated a new strategy in the 2000s to address the challenge of slums, in line with the national strategy and drawing on the model applied in Mumbai since the 1990s.

Approved in 2007, the Master Plan for Delhi 2021 acknowledges the shortcomings of the schemes to relocate slum dwellers in resettlement colonies on the city outskirts (DDA, 2007: Section 4.2.3). It thus plans to use an alternative strategy geared to delivering housing in multi-story buildings, under a public-private partnership (PPP), using land as a resource and applying the principle of cost recovery (as described earlier for the national program). In 2008, the DDA identified an initial list of 21 slums for rehabilitation, the first being Kathputli Colony. It was planned to build a total of 37,000 housing units under this new strategy.

The “close involvement” of NGOs and CBOs in the rehabilitation process is another principle laid down in the Delhi Master Plan (DDA, 2007: Section 4.2.3). However, unlike the program implemented in Mumbai, no provision was initially made for a residents’ consent clause.

In March 2015, the DDA published a draft policy for slum rehabilitation on its website, based on the Mumbai model (DDA, 2015). To summarize the main lines mentioned earlier, the policy involves private developers in onsite slum rehabilitation. It allots them part of the land previously occupied by the slum so that they can undertake real-estate developments for their own profit to compensate for the costs they incur by building housing for the slum dwellers (Deboulet, 2007; Nijman, 2008). The DDA draft policy broadly follows the principles already set out in the

[14] This agency was set up in 2010 within the purview of the Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi to take over the functions of the former Slum and *Jhuggi Jhopri* Department of the Municipal Corporation.

[15] Interviews with some ten NGO executives and independent activists, conducted in Delhi in November and December 2009, and in July 2014.

Master Plan, but with one important addition: the introduction of a prior consent clause, also present in the Mumbai model. Before implementing a slum rehabilitation project, the developer must first obtain the consent of at least 70% of the eligible dwellers. What is remarkable in this proposed adjustment is the DDA's exercise of self-criticism, which recognizes the problems encountered in the Kathputli Colony pilot project (described below): "On analysis, it was found that prior consent from the Slum dwellers was one of the key elements that was missing in this project" (DDA, 2015: 2).

An exploration of these various policy documents reveals how the concept of the residents' participation often implies NGO involvement in the implementation of public programs. In rehabilitation projects, the concept of participation is based on the notion that slum dwellers are organized into a "community" represented by NGOs and/or CBOs, which can be federated through a residents' association covering the entire settlement.

It should also be pointed out that the question of resident consent has been addressed with some variations depending on the states and institutions concerned. Over the last two decades, adjustments have been made either in the direction of better protection for residents' interests or, on the contrary, a weakening of their guarantees.

2. A reality check: feedback from the field

When discourses are confronted with realities on the ground, a marked disconnect appears between the principles announced in slum clearance policy documents and current practices during public authority interventions, be they slum demolition operations or projects for rehabilitation or relocation. We now examine more specifically how information circulates and what arrangements are in place to ensure consultation with the residents, in other words, the application (or not) of the first steps crucial to any participatory process. This will help us to shed light on several factors that, from the outset, limit the residents' involvement in projects that affect them. Our case studies confirm the importance of three factors identified by Jordhus-Lier *et al.* (2016): (i) the retention of information by some actors, (ii) belated communication, and (iii) the ambiguous role of intermediaries.

These diverse dimensions are illustrated by field research for the most part conducted in Delhi from 2007 to 2015, and in Chennai from 2011 to 2013. Several series of in-depth interviews were held with slum dwellers affected by public authority interventions, as well as with various actors involved in the execution of these projects (local leaders, social workers from NGOs and CBOs, activists, elected politicians, civil servants, private consultants, executives from property development companies).

2.1. Retention of information

In Delhi, the first example of a flagrant dearth of information is the case of V.P. Singh Camp. This squatter settlement on the southern periphery of the city was selected by the DDA in 2006 for a flagship rehabilitation project to construct 3,500 low-income housing units in partnership with the private sector. Two years later, most of the slum dwellers had still not been informed of the rehousing project directly affecting them, and even less of its terms and conditions. Only a handful of local leaders had received information through their elected politicians, but they had deliberately refrained from passing this on to the members of their community. No procedure for consulting the residents, or even informing them, had been put in place – either by the DDA or the private developer, who had nonetheless already embarked on the first leveling and excavation works on the land adjoining the settlement. In a word, the residents had been totally sidelined from the rehabilitation project. The project was finally stopped in 2009 as it had failed to obtain the necessary authorizations from the Department of Environment and Forests. In fact, the land that the DDA had ceded for residential use is located in Delhi's green belt, and is a protected area... but the developer had not been informed of this. This case study also shows how retention of information can intervene at different levels and be used by different actors to serve their own interests.

A serious shortfall in information also characterized the new rehabilitation project launched in 2008 by the DDA in Kathputli Colony, a slum settlement hosting about 3,000 families and located in one of Delhi's central areas. The residents only became aware of this in-situ rehousing project in February 2009, when the minister of Urban Development laid the foundation stone for a group of fourteen-story buildings, comprising 2,800 two-room apartments each with a surface area of 25 square meters. In early 2014, five years after the project launch and with the transit accommodation in a nearby camp ready to house the families during the building works, some key questions had still not been clarified by the DDA, notably the eligibility criteria to access an apartment and the financial terms and conditions. This lack of transparency created not only a climate of anxiety for the residents regarding their inclusion in the rehousing project, but also a feeling of distrust towards the authorities. Three years after the DDA's 2010 survey to establish the list of eligible households, the residents still had no access to the results despite numerous attempts by their leaders, including recourse to legal actions such as "Right to information" applications.^[16] A list of eligible households was finally released by the DDA in February 2014, but was contested by the residents. Realizing that they had had little control over the way in which the eligibility survey had been conducted, the local leaders and residents, together with an NGO, set about carrying out supplementary surveys. However, the claims of the excluded families were mostly rejected, even though supporting documents were provided. This example highlights not only the practices of information retention by the public agency in charge of the project, but also the refusal to accept the legitimacy of information supplied by the residents to defend their right to rehousing.

[16] The Right to Information Act, passed in 2005, gives Indian citizens the right to file requests for information with public administrations.



An alley in Kathputli Colony, Delhi, November 2011.

Photo credit : Shankare Gowda, 2011.

2.2. Belated communication

During slum demolitions, the residents are often poorly informed or receive insufficient notice of the demolition date. The requirement that a month's notice be given seems to be seldom respected in both Delhi and Chennai.

Thus in 2001 in Durga Basti, a slum settlement located in northern Delhi and home to over 2,000 households, the police informed the residents only one hour before the bulldozers arrived. The households who had left for work that morning returned in the evening to find their dwellings razed and all their belongings lost, buried under the rubble.^[17] In Chennai, the squatter settlements along Buckingham Canal were evicted during a large-scale operation in July-August 2002, causing the displacement of 2,300 families. The dwellers were aware of the threat of eviction but had no precise information on its planned date. In fact, they were busy demonstrating against these eviction projects, demanding recognition of their occupancy right and the provision of urban services, when the bulldozers arrived on site to demolish the dwellings. According to some of the residents, this was a deliberate strategy on the part of the

[17] Interviews with residents of the demolished slum, near Durga Basti, Delhi, 11/02/2008.



The transit camp for the residents of Kathputli Colony, Delhi, December 2013, two months before the first families settled in.
Photo credit : Véronique Dupont, 2013

public authorities: not to give precise information in advance in order to prevent the residents from mobilizing and resisting. In other words, the intention was clearly to take the residents by surprise. Moreover, the vagueness of information and the politicians' promises to prevent the evictions may also cause residents to be in denial of reality until the very last minute – a phenomenon often observed in processes of forced displacement (Turton, 2003; Menon-Sen *et al.*, 2008; Dupont *et al.*, 2014).

The case of Kathputli Colony in Delhi, referred to earlier to illustrate the lack of information, highlights a further point. When information on the terms and conditions of a rehousing project is given at an advanced stage in project implementation, this makes the procedure for consulting residents sham and symbolic. In fact, the residents were not involved in project design and planning, but only informed after the fact. On this count, the episode of the show apartment is telling. A show apartment had been built in the yard of the school run by one of the NGOs operating in the settlement. According to the DDA engineer interviewed, the purpose of this apartment was to present the rehousing project to the residents.^[18] The

[18] Interview with a DDA engineer, Delhi, 03/11/2011.

explanations offered by an executive from the development company in charge of the project highlight another viewpoint: the show apartment had been built so that it could be presented to the DDA for approval, and not to gather the residents' opinions.^[19] Additionally, access to this apartment became a bone of contention between two rival NGOs engaged with the slum dwellers. The apartment was finally closed to the public, making visits impossible. This meant that the housing complex was designed with no attempt to incorporate the views of those who were to live there. The same remark holds true for the transit camp: prefabricated housing units were presented to Kathputli Colony community leaders on the site of the future camp, but any modification to these was out of the question.

2.3. The ambiguous role of intermediaries

In the example of V.P. Singh Camp, the local leaders could have fulfilled the role of intermediary between the politicians and the residents by passing on information about the project but they chose, on the contrary, to hold it back.

In Kathputli Colony, an NGO initially played a key role as knowledge broker vis-à-vis the authorities, the private developers, and the residents. The NGO's role nonetheless seems ambiguous. On the one hand, it facilitated interactions between the DDA and the residents and allowed some degree of consultation – or at least information. On the other hand, it skewed the consultation process. Many of the residents and a rival organization active in the colony challenged the NGO's legitimacy to represent the opinions and interests of the entire Kathputli Colony population. Certainly, given the broad diversity of communities in the colony and the divides based on caste, religion, home region, and economic activity, it would have been difficult for any single organization to claim that it represented the community as a whole and to fulfill the role of a neutral and consensus-building agent. Thereafter, the challenged NGO gradually withdrew from its mediating role, encouraging the local leaders to organize themselves and interact directly with the authorities.

The Kathputli Colony residents were thus deprived of the right to a genuine consultative procedure to gather their opinions on the project as well as their needs and priorities. They were entitled to no more than project presentation meetings and incomplete information. The direct interactions between the public authorities, the developer, and the residents materialized as different types of more or less open "spaces for participation" (Cornwall, 2002). The first information meetings were arranged by the DDA, together with the consultant or developer, and correspond to "invited spaces" (*ibid.*). Later in the process, other public meetings were launched by local leaders who invited DDA officials, thus creating a "negotiated space" (Baud *et al.*, 2008) in which the residents tried to actively promote their demands. These meetings were generally attended by 50–100 people, which is a relatively low figure for a settlement hosting at least 15,000 residents. Moreover, many interactions with the DDA only involved the local

[19] Interview with an executive from the company, Raheja, the developer that had been awarded this project, Delhi, 02/11/2011.

leaders, deemed to be the legitimate representatives of their respective communities. Yet, the outcomes of these meetings were not communicated to all the residents, which again shows that information flows can be blocked at different levels, including within the settlement itself.

These examples illustrate the ambiguous role of intermediaries but also point to the crucial question of representation. In fact, “not even in the most democratic, participatory processes is everybody involved in every stage of decision-making. There is always somebody who speaks *on behalf of* somebody else” (Jordhus-Lier *et al.*, 2016: 140). In the case of slums, where the role of spokesperson is often monopolized by traditional community leaders, who are seldom elected and even self-appointed, or by professionals from non-consensual NGOs, we can see how representation and mediation with the public authorities may induce various biases, and be a potential source of conflict.

The lack, the vagueness, and the belatedness of information are all hurdles to the effective involvement of residents in projects affecting them: to participate, one needs to possess a minimal amount of information. On the other hand, when residents become aware of the stakes, the lack of information can also become a reason to mobilize, and the absence of fair consultation a reason to resist a project.

This is what the public authorities realized at a late stage, much to the detriment of the Kathputli Colony rehabilitation project, when they recognized with hindsight: “At no point of time a formal or an informal agreement was drawn up between slum dwellers, DDA and the developer, wherein the JJ [*jhuggi-jhopri*] dwellers [sic] prior consent was sought for the rehabilitation” (DDA, 2015: 2). In fact, although the transit camp had been ready since early 2013 and the first families had been moved there in January 2016, almost all the families were continuing to resist transfer and occupy the Kathputli Colony site. Only 500 of the 3,000 families or so have settled in the transit camp.

Various findings from field research also show that the NGOs and local leaders who act as mediators and intermediaries for the residents are not impartial agents. They are also pursuing their own interests, which are not necessarily congruent with those of the residents; moreover, they are likely to use the information and knowledge they hold as an instrument of power over the residents.

Conclusion

The case studies conducted in Delhi and Chennai reveal a double divide in the communication process: the residents are not properly informed about the impending projects that affect them; and, for want of adequate consultation, the government agencies have little knowledge of the needs and priorities of the populations to be rehoused. This dearth of information and the lack of a space for the residents’ effective participation – and not simply minimalist or token consultation – are noteworthy in that they contradict the very principles set out in national and state policies.

Our field observations also highlight the challenges to ensure fair consultation in contexts where populations are heterogeneous and have diverging interests. In addition, information retention by intermediaries – some local leaders and NGO representatives – may well bias consultations and prove detrimental to an effective participatory process involving residents. NGO involvement does not suffice to counter the lack of communication and participation; the focus on these organizations as the best intermediaries to help implement slum rehabilitation projects, as recommended by the policy documents we examined, runs the risk of harming the interests of affected residents. As has been foregrounded for other settings (Navez-Bouchanine, 2007), it is crucial to take into account “the conflicting nature of the relationships between the actors” (*ibid.*: 109) – including relationships within the resident communities and between these and the organizations claiming to defend their cause. The failure to do so can but contribute to transforming the principle of participation in informal settlement clearance policies into a “methodological decoy” (*ibid.*).

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Rethinking Precarious Neighborhoods

On the occasion of the United Nations Habitat III Conference on cities, to take place in Quito (Ecuador) in October 2016, this research publication proposes an innovative reflection on precarious neighborhoods – whose populations are set to double over the next twenty years.

Building on extensive field research across all continents, the different contributions show that these precarious neighborhoods suffer above all else from a negative vision that poses an obstacle to grasping their diversity and understanding their singularities. Yet, these neighborhoods are home to ordinary citizens who work, move around the city, and build their dwellings with no financial support from public authorities. Since the 1960s, researchers have been deconstructing the accepted ideas about such precarious neighborhoods and showing how a policy based on the ideals of justice could be envisioned, by challenging traditional programs aimed at clearance, rehousing, rehabilitation... Rethinking precarious neighborhoods also means that it is important to develop an ambition for knowledge – in depth – of these neighborhoods, linked to a policy for recognition, beyond the technical categories of rehabilitation or the formal categories of citizenship.

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