

## **Housing and Habitat Planning: Ubiquitous Global Implementation**

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Recent COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the rapid spread of novel Coronavirus causing global concern about housing security and conditions. Due to the lockdown of cities and the risks of unemployment, the low-income families and those inhabiting informal settlements have been left helpless and at risk of being evicted with almost little or no money.

Rent is presently the biggest expense for households accounting on an average for one-third of their income (OECD, 2019). COVID-19 has exposed the housing paradox; houses sit empty in a time when people are in a desperate need of shelter (Sharif and Farha, 2020). According to a recent study undertaken by the Princeton's Evictions Lab, Florida ranks 28<sup>th</sup> out of 50 at protecting the rights of tenants in response to the coronavirus. Out of the 2.5 million households dependent on a regular salary to pay the rentals for their rented accommodation (Shimberg Center for Housing Studies, 2017), more than 1.5 million have filed unemployment claims since mid-March, with many people being thrown out jobs in the wake COVID-19. Even though Gov. Ron DeSantis signed an executive order suspending evictions and foreclosures for 45 days, some of these households still will encounter the threats of eviction in the near future (O' Donnell, 2020). Therefore, a deeper structural change in housing system should be considered (Capps, April 2020). In India, the issue of

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shelter deprivation and vacant housing has been emerging in recent decades (Kumar, 2016).

Housing is also fundamentally connected to public health, built environment and sustainable habitat in cities (Kumar, 2015). COVID-19 raises a fundamental question on how we manage the dense and mobile population in megacities and urbanization in the global South. Mumbai has 76,790 people per square mile, Tokyo 12, 296 people per square mile, Barcelona 12,579 people per square mile, Lagos 47,027 people per square mile, Shenzhen 44, 464 people per square mile, Bogota 35,000 people per square mile and Shanghai 34,718 people per square mile (Kolb, 2019). In India, almost half of the urban population lives in houses with per capita space of less than a single room (Khan and Abraham, 2020); 17.4% urban households living in informal settlements (Census of India, 2011). Most of these families living in slums and informal settlements are still lack basic facilities such as access to water, electricity, adequate sanitation, proper drainage, waste management, secure tenure, house durability, and sufficient living space (UN-Habitat, 2003; Mukherjee, Sundberg and Schutt, 2020). These housing conditions are challenging the effectiveness of prevention based on the high standard of hygiene and social distancing.

Rethinking housing and habitat planning as a prevention and cure is significant, it will become a key for survival in the long term (Sharif and Farha, 2020). Many diseases are known to have shaped cities through developments in urban planning and management and sanitation systems in response to outbreaks (Klaus, 2020). Case in point is SARS which made people think about cities and connectivity as a fundamental factor and Ebola, which made people think about the coexistence of cities in the Global North and South (Klaus, 2020). At present, COVID-19 is joining a long list of contagious diseases with its likelihood of leaving its marks on the urban spaces and its design.

It is critical for the governments of multiple levels to collaboratively address the pre-existing global housing crisis which has affected 1.8 billion people across the globe, even before the pandemic (Sharif and Farha, 2020). Governments and civil societies need to come together using a holistic approach to ensure the collective right to affordable, accessible, and adequate housing and support recovery of the most vulnerable while building back the cities better.

During the critical emergent phase, local governments must take substantial measures to protect vulnerable communities from homelessness by securing the right to adequate housing for all through moratoriums on evictions, deferrals of mortgage payments, postpone eviction court proceedings, introduce of rental stabilization or reduction measures, prohibit utility shut-offs, create emergency funds, establish cash transfers, provide handwashing facilities and health care services in informal settlements. Essentially, they should focus on helping homeless and marginalized groups access more housing opportunities to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and other social risks in the long run.

As per the recovery phase, the concerns about the most vulnerable groups are also important when governments plan to revive economy in the context of post-COVID-19 new normal. Initially, it is necessary to evaluate the fiscal gaps between current mitigation actions and the urgent needs of the poor families at the household or grassroots level. Later, the impact of lockdown on vulnerable families and housing provisions in the long run should also be projected from neighbourhood to regional level. It requires a holistic, inclusive, and organized approach that could engage municipal governments, NGOs, communities, and private sectors effectively to fill up the knowledge and monetary gaps between housing demand and supply from the bottom to top. Furthermore, such a timely public-private partnership should aim at alleviating

poverty, reducing unemployment, and providing affordable housing with basic infrastructure, public services, and ration at the state and national levels. In addition to the vertical fiscal transfer and orders within one state, the institutional incentives for attracting external funds from private sectors or global collaborations through spatial planning experiences sharing and multilateral development investment can also facilitate the pandemic relief. The latter might be both important for the sustainable development and economic recoveries in the global North and South.

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