

CRITICAL ISSUES OF LOW-INCOME DWELLERS IN URBAN PLANNING

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This paper aims to address the some critical issues connected with the low-income dwellers in South Asian cities, particularly in the city of Colombo. It also attempts to examine the failure of policy interventions which were designed to address the issues. In this connection, many governments force low-income dwellers to settle outside the city, but this intensifies the hardships of the factory and casual workers, forcing them to trek every day long distance to reach their work place. On the other hand, city planners have provided low-cost housing in an attempt to save the low-income dwellers from squalor and disease but most such city dwellers were however disinclined to move in for reasons of their own, viz., comparatively high rent & bills, distance from place of work, attachment to place of present residence and neighbors. Also, the lack of genuine interest or ability to stand shoulders apart from the downtrodden and look into the matter from a hands-on perspective, coupled with politically charged separation of people contributes to only prolong the issues. Therefore, the role of state housing provision to the low-income dweller in cities has to be defined as to provide opportunities to satisfy, as far as practicable, housing needs, according to what people can afford and where they would like to live, not only to provide housing but to create a better living environment for residents.

Keywords: *Built Environment, City Structure, Urban Poor, Urban Social Issues, Sustainable Human Settlements*

1. Introduction

This paper, based on available literature, attempts to do a sociological analysis of critical issues among low-income dwellers in South Asian cities, particularly in the city of Colombo. Slums are considered to grow as homogeneous groups and relatively segregated from the main structure of city life on the basis of ethnic, race, caste, religion, and language. A few studies have been carried out which analyze the slums as a social category within city society. The prominent social scientists who gave focused light on slums in the West are: Thrasher: "The Gang" (1927); Zorbaugh: "The Gold Coast and The Slum" (1929); Whyte: "Street Corner Society" (1943); Wirth: "The Ghetto" (1956); Gans: "The Urban Villagers" (1962); Hunter: "The Slums-Challenge and Response" (1964); Clinard: "Slums and Community Development" (1966); Lewis (1959, 1966, 1968); Suttles: "The Social Order of the Slum" (1968); Jocano: "Slum as a Way of Life" (1975); and several others (Cited from Niriella, 2010: 75). Studies by these scholars highlight the relevance of slum dwellers as a social category in terms of their life situations, share in life opportunities and entitlements; social structure of slums; their sharing urban space

and conflict for it; inter-relationships within slum dwellers; their role in city economy; and issue of housing poverty.

Oommen and Mukherji (1986: 164) have noted that urban sociology gained importance in the seventies in India. It had till then been neglected under a false argument that India was a land of villages, hence urban sociology had little meaning. However, problems of rural-urban migration, urban development and urban slums attracted the attention of sociologists and social anthropologists in India (Ali, Rao, and Bijlani listed over 160 publications on slums in 1991). As a result of this trend, some prominent studies on Indian slums, have been contributed by Gupta (1968); Venkatrayappa (1967, 1972); Charles, (1970); Ramachandran (1970, 1991); Dasai and Pillai (1970, 1972); Wiebe (1975, 1977); Souza (1978); Karan, Bladen, and Singh (1980); Noor (1983); Rao and Rao (1984); Thakur and Dhadave (1987); Dhadave (1989); Ali (1990, 1991); Rao, Bhat and Kandekar (1991); Bijlani and Roy (1991); Das (1994); Ghosh, Ahmad, and Maitra (1995); Desai (1995); Sharma and Raju (2001); and Schenk, (2001). Some of these studies are more descriptive while others try to interpret the slum as a social category within the political economy of city (Cited from Niriella, 2010: 75).

Very few social scientists have paid attention to the studies on low-income dwellers in Sri Lanka¹. Some of them are: Kapferer (1977); Silva and Aathukorala (1991); Neville (1994); Thorbek (1998); and Niriella (2010). Further, government organizations like, National Housing Development Authority (NHDA), Urban Development Authority (UDA), Colombo Municipal Council (CMC) and Marga Institute, Sevanatha (NGO's) have conducted research on low-income dwellers, more delimiting the objectives of their studies/reports. Slum conditions in urban communities have thus drawn attention of a large number of scholars, like sociologists, social anthropologists, social workers, demographers, urban geographers, urban economists, urban political scientists, city planners and social organizations. They have studied low-income dwellers from different angles.

2. Objective and Methodology

In view of the above background, the purpose of present paper is to identify the issues and options with regard to the provisions of housing, particularly for economically weaker sections and low income groups of population in the city of Colombo. Basically, this is a library research on urban poor and their issues while the sources of secondary data like the census reports, research papers, newspapers, official records, journals, relevant books and other types of published materials in the area were used for the study. The materials were obtained from university archives, government bureaus and non-governmental organizations, etc.

¹ Use of the existing data and information-specially the data available under four previous city-wide surveys carried out by different agencies (e.g. These includes; the Survey of Slums and Shanties in the city of Colombo by the UDA in 1978, the Survey of Urban Low Income Settlements in Colombo by CMC in 1987 and the Survey (Data Profile) of Low Income Settlements by the Clean Settlements Program Unit (CSPU) under the Ministry of Urban Development, Housing and Construction in 1997/98 known as STP/REEL Database and the Poverty Profile-City of Colombo, 2002 – 'Sevanatha', Colombo).

3. The City and Urban Poor

In traditional societies, only a small part of the population lived in urban areas, but in the industrialized countries or societies today (e.g. Tokyo, New York, and London) between 60 to 90 percent live in urban areas or towns and cities. Even in developing countries today, cities (e.g. Mexico, Sao Paulo, and Mumbai) are growing at a faster rate and their population is also increasing very rapidly (Harvey, 2006: 610). The large and densely populated areas, known as cities, have undergone transformations since ancient times, and are historically classified now as pre-industrial, industrial, post-colonial, post-industrial, and 'new global cities'. Such cities have also rejoined, and differ in types of social and economic organizations as well as uses of space (Magill, 1995: 171). Also, there seems to be differentiation of individuals and families in the low, middle and high income categories living in these cities. Likewise, Wirth's Theory of Urbanism (1938: 1-24), 'Urbanism as a Way of Life', is seen as a characteristic tendency produced by the city. According to him, 'a city is a relatively large, dense, and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals'. Even, Weber (1958: 66-67) has looked at the city 'as a settlement, the inhabitants of which live primarily off trade and commerce rather than agriculture...the city is a market place'. For Marx (1976: 915), the city at a specific historical period signified the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Thus, the city in the European historical experience represents a break, a point of transition from one mode of production to another.

Early sociological theories of the city (1903- 1960) often display an attempt to merely describe the surface level social ties as a basis of various social structures focusing on the culture, the environment (ecological) and the moral order of the city often describing it as "a built environment", a "disorganized and isolated" place or even describing "the city is a market place". The poor of a city are more or less confined to the "isolated" areas. Taking Colombo city as an example, one could see that locales (like Mattakkuliya, Modara, Dematagoda and Maradana) from the North and (Borella, Dematagoda and Kolonnawa) from the North-East often are home to the downtrodden masses of the city. On the other hand a salient feature of developing countries is the migration of the rural poor in to the urban settings as seen in cities like Mumbai and Delhi. Cities tend to be packed to the brim with these migrating poor attracted to the cities in search of better prospects. This only furthers the bustle, pollution and the spread of diseases within city limits.

However, post 1960 sociological theories of the city (neo-Webarians –neo Marxists) manage to uncover as yet invisible social relationships i.e. planners and policy makers establish the city structure in order to replenish the labor force allowing them to systematically exploit that labor thus prolonging poverty within the working class (Slattery, 1985). Post-colonial Asian cities are now undergoing changes with the capitalist waves of globalization often sharing a set of characteristics inherent to them. Mumbai and Colombo are prime examples of this type. These tendencies often bring about class segregation among the masses. Many who used to belong to the downtrodden are paved the way in to the middle class through employment opportunities generated in the Middle East and Europe.

However there still prevails a class within the city that becomes the poorest of the poor, helping create even more social issues like broken families, school drop outs, street children, divorce,

crime escalation, drug addictions, etc. along with more prominent dangers of environmental pollution, epidemics and alcoholism. These problems require more than temporary solutions. Foremost among viable solutions has become systematic urban planning. Political separation of masses is a detriment to social upheaval. The poor need education and empowerment in order to overcome their strain too. Even we have a duty to make sure that the urban poor do not end up being merely a tool of the political machine and to see to it that even they receive a worthwhile life experience that, seemingly for now, is only reserved for the “cream” of society.

4. Urban Poor in India and Bangladesh

India was ranking 47 as per the HPI-I index and having a HPI-I value of 35.9 per cent, a historical overview of India's development (i.e. general statistics and progress in five year plan periods) has been done here to highlight the factors that have led India to its present state of poverty. Malgavkar (1991) laid stress on the impact of the increase in the population size in both the rural and the urban areas. Even at the 1991 level, at the 2001 level and considering a 7 per cent growth rate. It was observed that the percentage of the rural poor was higher than that of the urban poor. However, it was also simultaneously observed that large sections of the population (which had been rural in the past) had begun migrating to the urban areas. Malgavkar gave a projection of the Indian population as being 986 million by the year 2001. Malgavkar had given an estimate for the labor force in 1985 to be 247.5 million and for the year 2001 as being 364.32 million. Further, Malgavkar estimated that there would be an increase in the unemployment mainly due to a simultaneous increase in industrialization, urbanization and monetization of the economy. He emphasized that the government should take a serious stance on formulating and implementing its demographic policy so that it could continue to cope with meeting the employment needs of the people and also be able to provide them a good quality of life. Malgavkar also gave figures for the total housing requirements in the urban areas as being 69 million houses needed by 2001 against a present availability of 32.3 million houses. This shortage of housing had been observed to be a major cause of the increase in the urban poor population in the form of the growth of the slum areas in the cities. In the urban areas, in its slum pockets, Malgavkar also showed how endemic poverty in terms of inadequate nutritional levels of the people and crowded and insanitary conditions lead to the increasing levels of health problems among the population. Foremost in the areas of the health problem, particularly in the Indian cities (e.g. Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Nagpur, Pune, Bangalore, and Hyderabad) among the low income groups were a rise in communicable diseases, health problems of the children and a higher mortality rate among this income group. HIV/AIDS as a current issue of health related problems was also projected to take a high toll of the population in India with the current estimates of such cases continuing to increase in the next century. Thus, the meager resources allocated to this sector by the government at the national and state levels have failed to make any significant impact on the housing situation of a larger segment of urban population in India.

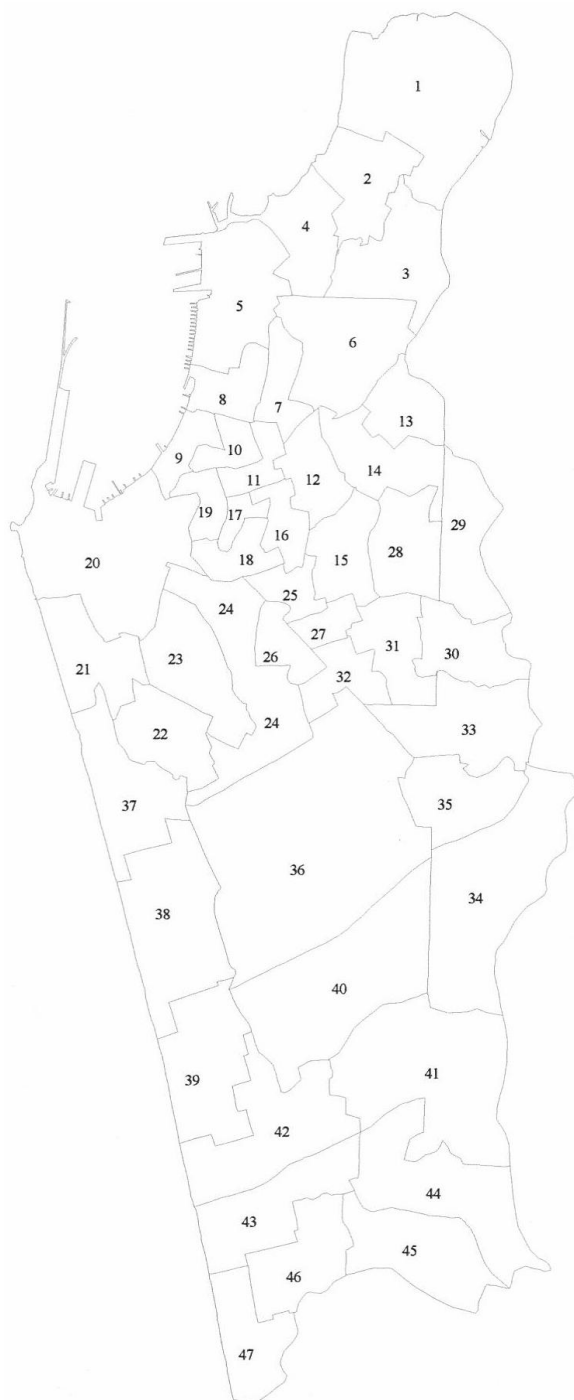
However, one of the poorest countries in Asia, Bangladesh, provides an important site for testing different methods of solving urban housing problems. Choguill (1985, 1987) articles, in “Solutions and Problems for Housing the Poor” and “Lessons from the Plan Failed in Dhaka”, that housing problems cannot be dealt with in isolation from other urban dimensions. Along with problems of financing and self-help are those of urban migration flows, industrial and infrastructure policies and the need for physical planners to overcome the whole process.

5. The Urban Growth of Colombo

The city of Colombo, the capital city of Sri Lanka, stands as the biggest urban centre of the country. The city consists of 37.3 sq. km. (3731 hectares) area and forms a long coastline land strip, stretching from North to South. The Colombo city is a relatively large dense and socially heterogeneous, and is also the major commercial and administrative centre of Sri Lanka. Since the country's independence in 1948, the city's administration has been taken up by the local leaders. According to Hulugalle (1965: 5), 'Until Ceylon received her political Independence in 1948, Colombo was always under strong foreign influence and usually under foreign domination. The Sinhalese did not seem to have formed a significant part of the town's population and had very little say in its administration. The establishment of the Colombo Municipal Council in 1866 was perhaps the first substantial step taken by the rulers to give the Ceylonese the feeling that Colombo was their own city and metropolis'. The Colombo Municipal Council had enjoyed a special position of primacy in the country's local government structure until the promulgation of the Thirteenth Amendment to Sri Lanka's Constitution in 1987 that created the Provisional Councils (PC) system with supervisory and directive functions over local government institutions. The Provisional Council system pushed the Municipal Council, which up to then had been the country's second tier of administration, to be the third tier. Also, five parliamentary electorates, namely the Colombo North, Colombo Central, Borella, Colombo East and Colombo West cover the CMC area (City Data Profile, 1999/2000, and City Development Strategy, 2000: 10 -11). For domestic representation, the Colombo Municipal Council area (CMC) is divided into 47 Wards (see: Map No. 01) coming under 6 administrative districts. Towards 1998/99, only 49 per cent of the total 83,904 housing units were permanent dwelling structures and the remaining 43,243 units were slums and shanties in the city. The road network covers 480 km. and the sewerage network covers 250 km. The city generates 625 metric tons of garbage daily. Several studies point to a half the city population living below the poverty line. The CMC operates on an annual budget of 6 billion rupees (City Data Profile, 1999/2000, and City Development Strategy, 2000: 10-11). The CMC responsible for managing the city affairs is headed by a Mayor, and the Council, comprising 53 elected members, by the residents of the city. However, the CMC has no authority for the provision of services such as education, public transport services and public hospitals. Also, responsibilities providing such services lie in the hands of the national level ministries, departments and corporations.

However, the operation and maintenance of civic amenities and services, such as city roads, drainage, sewerage, water distribution, public parks, public toilets, solid waste management, recreational and community health facilities are some of the key service functions performed by the municipality. Under the current set up of supervision of the activities of the Municipal Council by the Provincial Council and the Department of Local Government, the Municipality has no authority over important issues such as recruitment of staff, increase of property tax and undertaking major investment projects etc. which has been a major hindrance to provide improved services demanded by its citizens. In this context, the CMC has to provide its services to the city population within an environment of inherited limitations of authority and resources (Poverty Profile, 2002: 4).

Map No. 01: Colombo Municipal Council - Wards and Boundaries



Name of Wards

- 1: Mattakkuliya
- 2: Modara
- 3: Mahawatta
- 4: Aluthmawatha
- 5: Lunupokuna
- 6: Bloemendhal
- 7: Katahena East
- 8: Katahena West
- 9: Kochchikade North
- 10: jinthupitiya
- 11: Masangasweediya
- 12: New Bazaar
- 13: Grandpass North
- 14: Grandpass South
- 15: Maligawatta West
- 16: Aluthkade East
- 17: Aluthkade West
- 18: Keselwatta
- 19: Kochchikade South
- 20: Fort
- 21: Slave Island
- 22: Wekanda
- 23: Hunupitiya
- 24: Suduwella
- 25: Panchikawatta
- 26: Maradana
- 27: Maligakanda
- 28: Maligawatta East
- 29: Dematagoda
- 30: Wanathamulla
- 31: Kuppiyawatta East
- 32: Kuppiyawatta West
- 33: Borella North
- 34: Narahenpita
- 35: Borella South
- 36: Cinnamon Garden
- 37: Kollupitiya
- 38: Bambalapitiya
- 39: Milagiriya
- 40: Thimbirigasyaya
- 41: Kirula
- 42: Havelock Town
- 43: wellawatta North
- 44: Kirulapone
- 45: Pamankada East
- 46: Pamankada West
- 47: Wellawatta South

Map Source : UDA

1 0 1 2 Kilometers

An overview of the main physical features of the city of Colombo and its important socio-economic characteristics will help us to place the informal sector within the total urban structure of the city. Marga (1979: 8) has explained the activities of Colombo city under two principal functions: first, the central administration and direction of government and public sector activity, and second, trade and commerce with its diverse supporting services. The residential components of the city which has grown on this urban base, together with the concomitant activities, form the other major element in the urban structure. The city could begin appropriately from the Port of Colombo, with the economic activities as its converge and concentrated around the Port. It could be argued that one of the factors, which had contributed the city's emergence as a primate city, was its Port. The urban growth of Colombo would have depended more on its importance as an administrative centre. Colombo's location, however, was more favourable for the export-import trade. The port was, therefore, developed to handle almost the entirety of the inward and outward flow of goods. The Pettah segment mainly consisted of the indigenous trading and business establishments, while the Fort contained the big British business houses and the important government offices (Marga, 1979-9).

Further, Marga (1979: 8-9) has indicated that today it handles nearly 85-90 per cent of the export-import tonnage. Hence, the economic life of the city is therefore organised largely around a wide range of commercial and servicing activities related to imports and exports. From the city, the main access to the Port is through the Fort-Pettah Section of Colombo. It is the Fort-Pettah Ward which functions as the hub or the centre of the city. It has the highest density and concentration of business, and commercial and government activities.

Today, even Pettah with its narrow crowded streets continues to be the congested location of small-scale trading establishments, with its own characteristic style of organization and management. In contrast, most of the high-rise buildings are concentrated in the Fort segment which is more spaciouly laid out. The major business houses, the large department stores, the main banking institutions of the country and the main offices of a large number of more important commercial firms are located in this part of the city (Marga, 1979: 9-10). Apart from being the hub of the country's commerce, Fort is also the centre of government administration and contains the National State Assembly, the government secretariats which house several major government ministries, the Presidential Residence and Office, the Central Bank, the Inland Revenue Department and a host of other key government institutions. As we move South and South-East from the Fort segment, we enter the widely dispersed residential areas of the middle class, served by a number of marketing centres. As the city spreads to the south along the coast, shops and business establishments line the main arterial road, with concentrated shopping and market centres in the intervals of two to four miles.

Apart from the concentration of government activities in the Fort, new centres of government activity have grown in various parts of the city, mainly in the South and South-East parts. With the expansion of government activity, a cluster of government institutions have been located in Torrington Square and another complex of buildings has been developed in Narahenpita. If one were to distinguish between the main physical characteristics of different parts of the city, one

could say that the Northern and North-East parts of the city spreading outward from Pettah contains the small-scale, older, more congested and poorer areas. The section of the city spreading South and South-East from the Fort on the other hand contains the larger more modern buildings, the large-scale commercial activities, the important government offices and the elite residential areas (Marga, 1979: 10).

Hettige (1990: 27-29) has viewed that the rising property prices and new investment along with consumption opportunities invited many affluent people into the city. At the same time, the economically weaker sections such as the lower middle class and even sections of the middle class were compelled to leave the city, and move into the suburbs. The above restructuring of the city population has been accompanied by a corresponding growth of the suburban population (e.g. Nugegoda, Sri Jayawardenapura-Kotte, Maharagama, Kottawa, Kolonnawa, Dehiwala, Mt-Lavinia, Moratuwa, Panadura, Kelaniya, Wattala, Kiribathgoda, Ragama, Ja-Ela, Kadawata, Gampaha, and Negombo). Thus, a large middle and lower class population has moved into the suburbs. While most of them commute to the city daily for work, others rely on the local income sources.

The presence of a large mobile and stationary population in and around Colombo has facilitated rapid commodity flows across the city and suburbs'. It is these rapid and constant commodity flows that have made the analysis of the city economy as an internal structure and process, an almost impossible task. What exists today is a metropolitan regional economy along with that of the city and the surrounding suburbs which, in turn, functions in constant interaction with the rural hinterland through regional towns.

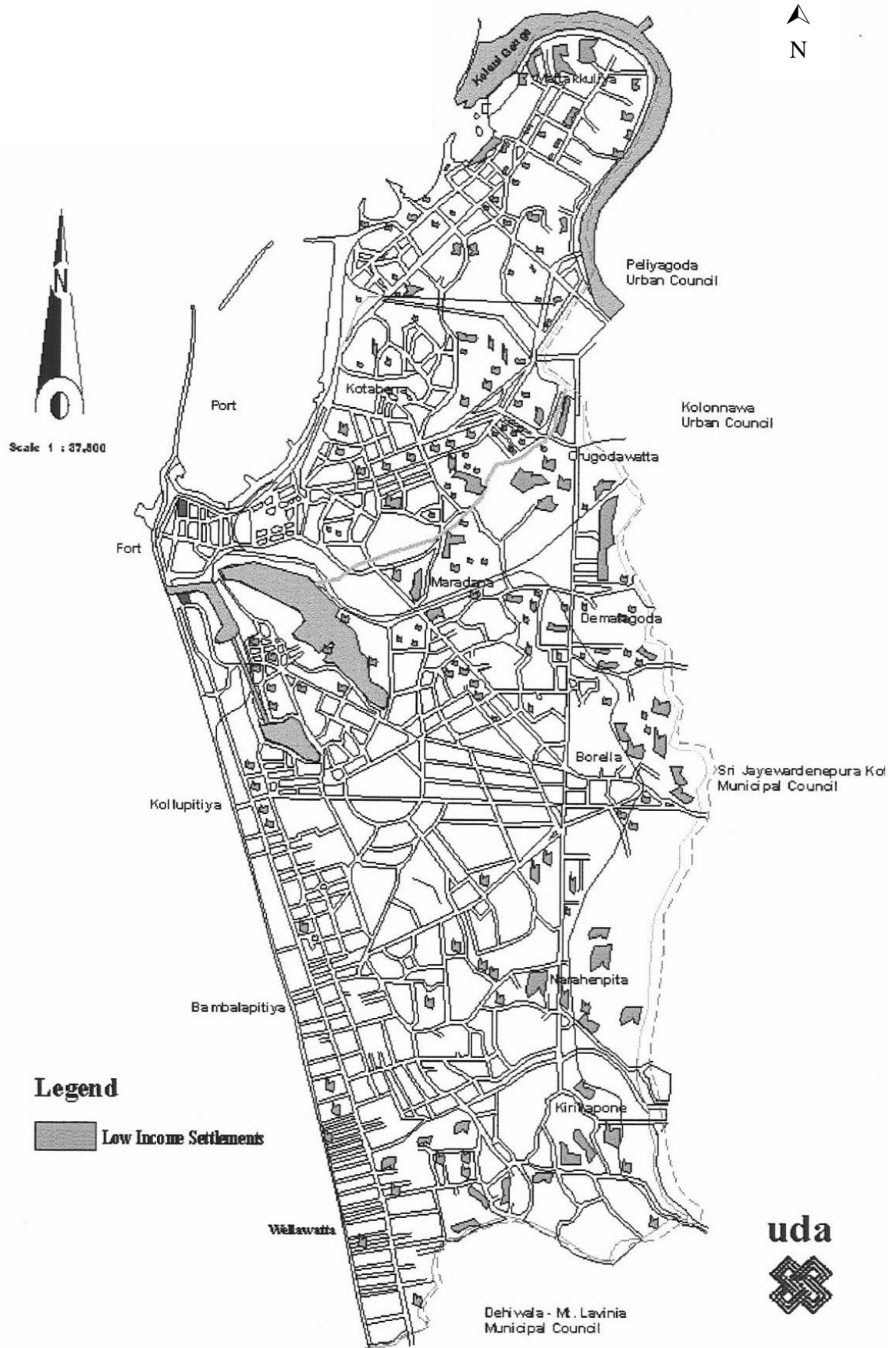
6. Low-income Dwellers in the City of Colombo

The phenomenon of slum has come to be regarded as a major problem of urbanization. Sandhu (1990: 108) has indicated that "A slum is usually a residential area of the poor. It is characterized by its substandard housing and the absence or inadequacy of amenities as compared with the rest of city". Today, slums can be found in all cities, old or new, planned or unplanned, big or small. Hence, 'bigger the city, bigger the slums'. It would be wrong to presume that slums are found in poor, developing countries only, for they are to be found in equal measure in some of the most developed countries of the world.

The slum and shanty type houses can be seen in almost all wards of the Colombo Municipal Council (CMC), though at different levels. According to Economic Review (1988: 16), the main municipal wards, with slum dwellings, are around the Pettah and Fort – the centre of commercial and trading activities of the city, and the Panchikawatta, Aluthkade-west, Masangasweedaya, Kehelwatta, Wekanda, Hunupitiya, Kochchikade-North, and South wards. The wards with a majority of shanty houses are located on the North and Eastern fringes of the city, and the Mahawatta, Mattakkuliya, Bloemendal, Dematagoda, and Lunupokuna wards. The Economic Review (1988: 16) has further indicated that the old houses which are now slums were once the residential houses of the middle class and the elite people of the city. With the expansion of commercial and trading activities into these residential areas, in the late nineteenth century, house owners shifted to the less congested areas of the city. Consequently, part of these old

houses, which were not used as stores and offices, have now been sub-divided into slum units and occupied by low income earning workers of the city (see: Map No. 02).

Map No. 02: Low-Income Settlements - City of Colombo



Karunasena (1988: 18) has mentioned that, after three decades of independence, about 51 per cent of the city population live in squalor environment of shanties and slums. Nearly half of this population was living in make-shift houses (shanties) on land to which they did not have a legal-ownership. They also lacked the basic amenities like water and sanitation. Due to their poverty, ownership of land or purchasing new plots or flats in the urban market was beyond their reach. As they had to live close to their work and business places, they were compelled to squat on whatever vacant land they could find, such as canal or river-banks, railway lines, roadsides, and sea-coast unused Crown and Municipal lands, and outskirts of the city. According to Silva and Athukorala (1991: 19), the shanty communities mostly evolved since 1948 so as to accommodate excess population as well as several kinds of new migrants in the city. The shanty dwellers, regarded as unauthorized residents of the city were until recently only partially serviced through public latrines and common water taps installed in the nearby public places.

The lands on which low-income settlements are located in Colombo city do have a number of owners. Some key owners include the Commissioner of National Housing (CNH), the National Housing Development Authority (NHDA), the Colombo Municipal Council (CMC), the Sri Lanka Land Reclamation and Development Corporation (SLLR&DC), private individuals, the Ceylon Government Railways (CGR) and the Ports Authority. It was estimated that around 1506 urban poor settlements were located within the Colombo Municipal Council (CMC) area as on 1998/99. However, the unique character of these settlements is that they are relatively small in size, i.e., 74 per cent of them have less than 50 housing units, while the large settlements are with more than 500 units accommodating about 0.7 per cent of the urban poor settlements in Colombo (Poverty Profile, 2000: 4). The dominant nature of the low-income settlements in the city is reflected in the condition of the housing stock as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1 Types of Housing Units in the City of Colombo – 1998

Type of Housing Units	Number of Units	Percentage (%)
Permanent Dwellings	40,861	49.0
Slums	22,358	27.0
Shanties	20,685	24.0
Total	83,904	100.0

Source: *Budget Report, Colombo Municipal Council, 1998.*

Thus, it is evident that the city of Colombo is still a city of dwellers with poor housing status, accounting a half of housing structures. According to a comprehensive survey carried out by the Sustainable Township Program of the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing in 1997-1998, about 1506 low-income settlements have been identified located within the city. The Ministry has used the term ‘under-served settlements’ to identify them as being poorly served and a detailed categorization was adopted to distinguish different types of settlements within this broad framework.

The UNICEF’s Urban Basic Services Improvement Program implemented during the period 1978 to 1986 was the first ever-major government program implemented to improve the condition of the urban poor settlements in Colombo and several other towns in Sri Lanka. Provision of communal toilets, water, drains, paved access roads, community halls and a series

of preventive health care programmes were carried out under the above programs. Simultaneously, the government housing programs implemented during the 1984-1994, which had an urban housing component, made a significant contribution towards improvement of low-income settlements. According to Chularathna (1999: 2-3), about 601 settlements accommodating approximately 240,000 urban poor were constructed under the government implemented amenities and housing improvement programs during the period 1978 to 1994. Yet, about 40 per cent of the urban poor in the city had to wait for future opportunities for improving their conditions.

There are a number of development programs launched by the government, which were initiated in 1994, to address the low-income shelter issues. The relocation of low-income settlements, affected due to canal improvement work as well as road improvement works in Colombo, has been undertaken by the respective government organizations. The effected families are being given alternative sites within the city. For instance, Badowita and Obeysekerapura Resettlement Programs are currently being implemented as major relocation sites in Colombo. However, there is no systematic approach and strategy to provide the required services. Under the technical assistance of Japanese OECF Program, the Ministry of Housing has been implementing the sustainable township program on a pilot scale in the city. The first phase has included five low-income settlements in and around Colombo city. The program is implemented as a community based program, involving greater community participation and contribution throughout the program implementation. The Colombo Municipal Council continues to provide and maintain common amenities (e.g. toilets, water, drains, access roads, community halls, etc.) in the low-income settlements, which are located on CMC, owned lands. Apart from the above, the preventive health care programs are continuing, irrespective of the land ownership of settlements, because health programs are carried out throughout the city. However, poverty in Colombo city is not entirely an economic phenomenon; instead, many who live in low-income settlements are not poor in economic terms. A significant number of slum people in Colombo have reached to lower middle class or even middle class level (Niriella, 2006: 108). Evidently, their poverty is mainly due to inadequate access to basic services, i.e., water supply & drainage, sewerage, garbage disposal, electricity, roads, and the resultant exposure to environment related consequences e.g., water-borne and vector-borne diseases like dengue. Even, Gill (1994: 432) has mentioned that “the problem of housing for the poor does not end by the providing low cost affordable houses to them, but with a provision for the basic amenities of life”.

7. Emerging Issues

As mentioned earlier, there are some critical issues connected with the urban environment in Colombo. Those relate to the high incidence of slums and shanties (urban poor), environmental pollution and problems of solid waste management. Slums and shanties are occupied by a significant number of low income urban dwellers (about 51 per cent). The figures (Cited by CMC, Poverty Profile, 2004: 1-3), are as follows: (1) Total number of poor urban settlements in the city - 1,614; Total number of low-income housing units - 53,659; and (3) Total number of families in these settlements - 77,612. Land Tenure: 63% percent of poor families (48,895) in the city do not have legally acceptable and marketable ownership of their land lot or house. Lack of Basic Amenities: (a) About 56 percent of poor families (43,462) in the city do not have access to adequate and reliable drinking water, (b) About 65 per cent (50,447) use shared toilets. Two

percent do not have any form of toilet, (c) About 17 percent (13,194) do not have any form of solid waste collection service while 49 percent (38,030) rely on communal collection points, (d) About 91 percent (1469) of the settlements do not have a community centre within their settlements. Insecure Income: (a) Only about 12 percent (9,314) of the poor urban families have a permanent source of income, (b) About 45 percent (34,925) of the families are engaged in unskilled, irregular employment activities, (c) About 89 percent (1,437) of the poor urban settlements have 10 to 25 percent families receiving poverty relief assistance. Family Instability: (a) Women who head households (due to desertion by the husband or his death or permanent disability) have to shoulder huge responsibilities. This has been a major problem among the poor families of Colombo, (b) In about 22 percent (355) of poor urban settlements in Colombo over 10 percent of households are headed by women. Hidden Social Problems: (a) Increasing instances of drug addiction among the urban poor, including youth, men, women, and even school children, is evident. Regrettably, there is little data available on these issues. However, a considerable number of over 2,500 drug addicts found to have been treated in Colombo in the year 2000, (b) Domestic violence, marital instability, and child abuse are other critical social issues in poor urban settlements which require serious attention, (c) Increasing isolation of youth, the elderly, and the destitute is an indication of family instability and the erosion of moral and spiritual values in poor urban communities, (d) Increasing numbers of street children and destitute families in the city is yet another concern, (e) A large number of school dropouts (usually in the age category of 15 to 20) with no education and employment skills are becoming dependent members of the family as well as the city.

8. Conclusion

The question of the urban poor has been a topic discussed the world over. The World Bank and many other responsible global organizations have taken steps to eradicate this aspect of society through various development programs. It is no secret that South Asia is plagued by poverty. One may argue that for decades, Sri Lanka and its neighboring countries like India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have been resorting to lackluster temporary solutions to the question of poverty in the face of continuous strategy failures. However, readymade solution to the problems of slums envisaged these days is that of slum-clearance. In this connection, and governments force slum dwellers to settle outside the city, but this intensifies the hardships of the factory and casual workers, forcing them to trek every day long distances to reach their work place. On the other hand, high ranking, well paid officials put in charge of administrations addressing the case of urban poverty have yet to deliver a concise solution to it. Even the fact of addressing the issue itself unfortunately gets confined to star class venues of higher class choice, spending huge sums of money, which clearly bestows no visible aid upon the poor. The lack of any genuine interest or ability to stand shoulders apart from the downtrodden and look into the matter from a hands-on perspective, coupled with politically charged separation of people contributes to only prolong the issue. At the same time it is somewhat sad that many tend to address the issue of urban poverty in terms of “karma”, thereby propagating a “culture of poverty” which in turn has given license to even academics to associate poverty with insurmountability. Also it is the responsibility of those who tend to cling to and find refuge in poverty to attempt to overcome that nature, through striving for personal/social development and by being organized against external forces that attempt to factionalize the community for their own benefit.

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