Resilient Slums: Role of social capital and institutions

Deepika Andavarapu*1 and Mahyar Arefi

1University of Cincinnati (UC) – 2600 Clifton Ave., Cincinnati OH 45221, United States

Abstract

More than half of the world’s population currently lives in cities and this trend is on a rise, especially in developing countries (World Bank, 2013). Nearly a quarter of this urban population or over a billion people currently live in informal settlements or slums. This can be attributed to large-scale urbanization combined with lack of affordable housing. Urbanization, even with an upsurge in slums, has the potential to improve the quality of life of the poor since it provides better income opportunities, access to schools and health care facilities (World Bank, 2013).

Slums are unique urban eco systems that emerge and adapt to changing external conditions. Research shows that, residents of these informal settlements rely on their social infrastructure (social capital and institutions) to adapt to natural (floods or fire) or man-made threats (eviction or crime). Their adaptability to changing circumstances is a perfect example of resilient urban systems (Perlman, 1976; Neuwirth, 2005; Weinstein 2009).

We propose ‘Resilient Slums Framework’ to study the resiliency and sustainability of these settlements. Social capital and institutions are two key attributes of this framework. Here we suggest that the slum dwellers use their social infrastructure to leverage against external threats and maintain resiliency of their community while improving their quality of life.

According to 2011 Indian Census, 44% of City of Visakhapatnam’s population or nearly 700,000 people live in slums. Pedda-Jalaripeta is one of the oldest and largest slums in the city and houses nearly 4000 families. A walk through the streets of the slum reveals that the community is an unusual mix of development and neglect. Small mounds of garbage line the streets and the stench of dried fish is overwhelming. While the lack of cleanliness is appalling, it comes as a surprise that there are a small number of thatched roofs in the vicinity. Most of the houses are made of bricks and cement and the incidence of huts is negligible. Almost all the streets in the slum are paved. Pedda-jalaripeta is located next to Lawson’s Bay Colony, which is the priciest real estate in the city. The fact that Pedda-Jalaripeta retains its status as a slum and continues to provide affordable housing and livelihood (fishing) to a large urban population is a testament to the resiliency of the slum.

We will study the social capital in Pedda-Jalaripeta using six dimensions of social capital developed by World Bank (Dudwick et al, 2006) and use the Institutional Analysis and Development framework introduced by Nobel Laureate, Elinnor Ostrom (Ostrom, 2005) to study the institutions within the slum. We will use ethnographic observations, field notes and formal/informal interviews for our study. The results of the study will provide some valuable insights into the role of social infrastructure in creating a resilient urban eco system, which provides affordable housing and livelihood to thousands of urban poor families.
this hypothesis were found reliable it would at least demand some rethinking of the relative weight placed on social infrastructure of slums in urban development policy.

**Keywords:** Adaptability, Resilience, Urban Resilience, social capital, livelihoods, local knowledge