

Victims of Beauty: An Inquiry on the Livelihood Impacts of Slum Resettlement Programme Driven by the City Beautification Project in Colombo

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Under the city beautification project (CBP) in Colombo, the government of Sri Lanka embarked on low-income high-rise housing projects to resettle approximately 68,000 low-income families in Colombo. According to the state's discourse, the purpose of slum resettlement programme was upgrading living standards of the urban poor. Accordingly, the government planned to construct 14 housing schemes and few of them were completed. In this background, this study argues that the slum resettlement programme has made adverse impacts on livelihoods of the urban poor that decreased the living standards of majority of urban poor compared to their previous status. The objective of this study was to identify the impacts of high-rise living on the livelihoods of the urban poor. This study employed a range of primary and secondary data sources; observations, key informants, semi-structured interviews and UDA reports on slum resettlement project. Primary data was collected from 30 re-settlers of *Mihindusenpura* low-income high-rise housing project in Colombo. The findings reveal that livelihood activities of the urban poor have been seriously affected by the slum resettlement programme. The causes for the break-down of the livelihoods are breaking-up of the social network, lack of space in the new apartments, restrictions of housing administration and distance from the original location or city centre. Disconnection of community network has adversely affected the livelihoods in few ways: loss of regular customers, loss of social support and loss of mutual relationships between the customer and seller. Lack of space is also an issue which makes it difficult to maintain the livelihoods of the re-settlers those who engaged in self-employments such as maintaining grocery, food processing, laundry service, bicycle repairing and salons etc in the previous place. On one hand, they do not have enough space in the new apartment to maintain their ventures. On the other hand, due to restrictions of the housing administration they cannot carry on their business. It is interesting to note that, most affected by the slum relocation programme are women who engaged in self-employments as food providers or other goods providers to shops closer to their homes. This study concludes that the state's motivation was to liberate lands for market driven purposes than upgrading living standards of the poor. The project leaders did not understand that livelihoods of the urban poor are connected with the area they live in and around. Hence, project planners should seriously think about livelihood restoration in future resettlement planning.

Keywords- urban poor, livelihoods, living standards, low-income high-rise housing