

## **Eviction Mapping: Uncovering Chennai's Invisible Injustice**

In 1971, the state government passed the Tamil Nadu Slum Areas (Improvement and Clearance) Act. The Act continues to be the only regulation that governs how the government can and should intervene in slum areas in Chennai. The law states that the government must first identify a slum area on the basis of the definition provided in the Act, officially “declare” the area to be a slum, and then improve the area. After a city-wide survey in 1971, the government identified and declared 1,202 slums, and added 17 slums to the list in 1985. Over decades, the government built tenements or provided in-situ improvements like roads, sanitation, and water connections for many of these declared slums.

### *New approach to slums: evict all, resettle some far away*

However, especially since the tsunami of 2004, there has been a clear change in the government's approach to slums in the city.

Firstly, no new slums have been declared since 1985, meaning that hundreds of thousands of poor city residents who moved to slums that came up in the last 30 years are living illegally. Residents of these undeclared slums live without tenure security, and most have lived for decades without access to basic services like running water and toilets.

Secondly, with funding primarily from the central government, the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board has constructed three large scale resettlement colonies on the outskirts of the city: Semmenchery, Kannagi Nagar, and Perumbakkam, with a total of nearly 35,000 units in all already constructed, and at least 13,000 more currently being constructed.

The existence of these resettlement colonies has allowed for a new approach towards slums in the city. Rather than declaring slums and improving them in-situ, as laid out in the Slum Clearance Act, the city has been evicting slums from the city and resettling some residents (those deemed “eligible”) in these resettlement colonies.

There is no official and comprehensive record of these evictions because they take place through different city and state departments, and for a range of projects – meaning that evictions are an invisible injustice, felt only by those men, women, and children whose homes, lives, and communities are demolished. To bring visibility to these evictions, the Transparent Cities Network (housed at CAG) has conducted a study on evictions in Chennai in the last decade and is presenting the first stage of our findings below.

### *Findings: evictions are widespread, arbitrary, cruel*

At least 63 evictions took place between 2005 and 2015, affecting an estimated 30,293 families, or approximately 150,000 people in the last decade. At least 4,511 families (approximately 22,500 people) were not provided resettlement, meaning they were left homeless after the evictions. At least 7 of the 63 recorded evictions took place in declared slums, meaning that official recognition did not provide them security against evictions.



Our survey found that evictions happen in an arbitrary manner. There is no mandatory notice period, no single department that deals with evictions, no consistently used standards for eligibility for resettlement such as “cutoff dates,” no rules for providing compensation to affected families, and no restrictions on the timing of evictions. Out of these 63 evictions, compensation was provided only for slums moved for the Metro-Rail project, and prior notice was provided only in 6 cases out of the 62, or less than 10% of the time.

Such variation across evictions is possible because slum evictions like these are extra-legal – they fall outside the purview of the Slums Act (which only permits evictions for the purposes of in-situ slum improvement), and Tamil Nadu does not have a resettlement and rehabilitation policy.

These slums were demolished for new infrastructure like flyovers and rail projects, or as part of city and water-body beautification projects. However, in some cases, evictions took place for projects that never materialized, such as the Port-Maduravoyal project.

#### *Conclusion:*

Hundreds of thousands of slum-dwellers live in unrecognized slums throughout the city, because the government has not provided legal recognition to slums under the Slums Act for over three decades. Instead, the government has chosen to evict slums from the central city areas and move eligible residents to large-scale resettlement colonies built on the city’s outskirts. Our research found that at least 150,000 slum-dwellers have had their homes demolished in the last decade in 63 separate evictions. A complete lack of affordable and legal land and housing in Chennai means that poor city-dwellers looking for work and educational opportunities will continue to squat on government and private lands, and that mass evictions will continue into the future.

The poor of Chennai need to demand urgent change. Chennai’s progressive past demands better than a future of class apartheid, where only the rich are permitted to live in the city center and the poor are relegated to the outskirts. According to the government’s own surveys, undeclared slums take up less than 2% of the land in the city – can the city not spare even this much to uphold the dignity of our working poor?

#### *Methodology*

We used reports from citizen groups, activists and residents of resettlement colonies to identify evictions that took place over the last decade, including their location and the numbers of affected people. Our team physically visited many of the sites to verify the exact location and to triangulate our reports with feedback from locals. Because of the nature of our methodology, our statistics cannot claim to be comprehensive.