

CITY, POVERTY AND EDUCATION: CHALLENGE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Though the world is rapidly urbanizing, India is still in an early stage of urbanization. This offers an opportune moment to steer the cities- centers of urbanization -towards sustainable development. From among the various sustainable development goals 2015, urbanization brings to fore the interconnectedness of cities, poverty and quality education. This paper explores these three on the site of the city of Vadodara in Gujarat.

The High Powered Expert Committee (2011) has observed that India's urban population will reach a figure close to 600 million by 2031. Yet, urbanization is uneven across different states of India. Census of India's 2011 figures suggest that Gujarat's 42.6 per cent population lives in urban areas. Gujarat's urban poor has gone up from 4.3 million in 2004-05 and 4.5 million in 2009-10 as a corollary to the state's high-speed urbanization (35.83 per cent urban population in the last one decade, highest in the country) and offers enough reason to believe that Gujarat's slum population would also be rising at an even higher pace. In the context of urbanization, cities will have to become engines of economic growth and national development (HPEC, 2011). Over and above these, in order to pursue sustainable development in cities, attention to the social infrastructure, chiefly education, thus merits attention.

The 74th Constitutional Amendment empowers the Municipal Corporation for governance of city under which it provides for education of the poor in the city. The urban poor's experience of poverty is more formidable, acute and complex as compared to the rural poor. Specifically the challenges faced are: a higher sense of deprivation and demoralization than their poor cousins in the rural areas; access to food only through trade, whereas their rural counterparts can gain access to food directly as well as through trade; typically poor education, accompanied by lack of experience and skills; unstable incomes, mainly earned in the informal sector, often by retrieving and selling wastes or by performing minor personal services; little protection from sickness and injury; unpredictable demand for their services; little human capital and almost no physical capital; and no access to credit markets. In this backdrop, an analysis of the urban poor's experience of education on the site of Municipal Corporation Schools of Vadodara is presented. The select glimpses of the everyday life of students in these schools offer significant insight on the relevance of schooling and schools. The negotiations between urban poor students and teacher/principal for space, time, social identity and relevance on the site of municipal corporation schools indicate that schooling is just incidental for the urban poor children. The

paper concludes that alternative designs of schooling need to be developed for sustainable development of cities.

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