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Housing, living in India fraught with accessibility, other challenges: Report

Housing and Land Rights Network said that certain policies aim to redress the housing and land crisis in India, others promote inequality and insecurity



The HRLN report recommends the development of a human rights-based law on adequate housing and land.

New Delhi: Ahead of an international UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in Ecuador later this year, an Indian voluntary group observed that “housing and living conditions in India for the majority continue to be inadequate and fraught with challenges related to accessibility, affordability, habitability, location and tenure security.”

“While certain government policies and initiatives aim to redress the housing and land crisis in the country, others promote inequality and insecurity,” said New Delhi-based Housing and Land Rights Network (HRLN) in a report titled *Housing and Land Rights in India*.

Habitat III is scheduled to be held in Quito, Ecuador, in October.

“The declaration ‘housing for all’ by the government is encouraging but there is an urgent need for law and policy development and implementation to be guided by the human rights framework,” the conclusion of the report says.

The Narendra Modi government, since coming to power in April-May 2014 has launched the Housing For All by 2022 Mission to provide at least 20 million homes to people belonging to the economically weaker sections and lower income categories over the next seven years at an expected cost of around `3 trillion. The mission will provide rehabilitation of slum dwellers with participation of private developers, promote affordable housing for weaker sections through credit-linked subsidy and subsidy for beneficiary-led individual house construction or enhancement.

The report, however, quotes an unnamed 2015 study which projects that urban housing shortage in India is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 6.6% for 10 years and increase to 34 million units by 2022.

Modi has also launched programmes for the development of “smart cities” and “smart villages”—i.e. develop world class infrastructure in cities and create urban infrastructure like piped gas connections, sanitation facilities, hospitals and educational facilities besides job opportunities in villages so that residents do not migrate to the cities.

The report recommends the development of a human rights based law on adequate housing and land that incorporates provisions of international law, guidelines and human rights principles. Given the vast numbers of central and state laws that cause confusion and contradictions, “the government should promulgate a National Right to Adequate Housing Act,” the report recommended.

The report also urged the government to define “affordable housing” and “develop appropriate mechanisms to ensure delivery so that the most marginalised and deprived individuals, groups and communities are able to benefit.”

It also sought a moratorium on forced evictions, focus on rural development, agrarian reform and investment in rural areas to prevent land grabbing, displacement and forced migration to urban areas besides develop and promulgate a National Right to Homestead Act to provide all landless rural families with land for housing construction and to support subsistence livelihoods including agriculture.