

PAPER ID: 20260201025

## Leadership Gaps and Limited Civic Engagement among Urban Resettled Families: Consequences on Resilience Building in Ezhil Nagar, Chennai

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**Abstract:** Urban resettlement programs often disrupt pre-existing social networks, leadership structures, and livelihoods, limiting civic participation and socio-economic resilience. This mixed-methods study examines these dynamics in the Ezhil Nagar resettlement colony, Chennai, India, with a focus on understanding how resettlement and its impoverishment risks affect community organisation, social cohesion, and residents' engagement with civic institutions. The research highlights the consequences of spatial displacement, heterogeneous household allocation and administrative fragmentation on the community's overall well-being. Findings indicate the reasons for failed informal leadership, weakened social networks and the poor engagement of residents in development facilitation approaches by the government and non-government actors. Economic vulnerabilities, including disrupted livelihoods, limited access to savings and credit, and gendered challenges, further constrain residents' capacity for collective action and socio-economic resilience. The study underscores that physical relocation and housing facilities alone do not ensure development; the absence of facilitated community engagement, institutional support, and safety measures exacerbates marginalisation.

**Keywords:** Urban resettlement, community organization, civic participation, leadership vacuum, socio-economic integration, economic vulnerabilities.

### I. Introduction

Community is fundamentally rooted in social interactions, networks, and shared relationships among interconnected people in shared space. Social living shaped by kinship, locality, shared action, and collective goals, along social capital are important factors. Interplay of people, place social networks define a functional community structure. Traditional urban informal settlements replicated all these foundational characteristics, retaining their rural community composition and norms in the urban. Caste-based kinships and shared spatial cohesion guided social interactions in Indian slum communities (Rao, 1990). The social networks have supported community organization and right-based movements (Chandrasekhar, S., & Mitra, A. (2018), enabling residents to organize, advocate for their rights, and mobilize collectively against socio-economic challenges and rising crime (Fattah & Walters, 2023). It offered social protection and functioned as a social control mechanism to an extent.

Relocation and Resettlement in slum-upgrading approaches, however, disrupt these foundational community characteristics, with alienation from the space and separation from the neighbourhood connections. Administrative practices, such as shuffling households—either to prevent conflicts or through random allocation—fragment pre-existing networks (Desai, 2018; Patel & Mandhyan, 2014). This social disarticulation dismantles trust, reduces social capital (Cernea, 2000), and undermines the capacity for collective action and mutual support (Downing,

1996). Families are separated from kinship groups, caste associations, and familiar neighbours, experience increased vulnerability and marginalization.

Relocation results in a multifaceted impoverishment risk, that disrupt livelihood access, social interactions, access to services and resources (Cernea, 2000), generating a new set of vulnerabilities. Researches indicate that only a minority of displaced residence experience improved living condition (Patel & Mandhyan, 2014), heavily dependent on the nature and economic opportunities of the resettlement site and their socio-economic status. Resettles struggle with poor physical infrastructure and WASH facilities, and security vulnerabilities, yet fail to raise their voice. A critical setback is the fragmented leadership structure and failure to establish new leaderships. Former community leaders lose legitimacy in heterogeneous settings and new power dynamics emerge, often discouraging collective action and engagement in community affairs.

The fragmentation and leadership-loss translate directly into barriers to civic associations. Community organizations such as Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) often fail to function in resettlement colonies (Desai, 2018), as residents are distrustful of new neighbours and disengaged from collective maintenance, planning, and decision-making. Administrative gaps, including vacant units or illegal occupancy, further exacerbate conflicts and reduce participation (Patel et al., 2015; Patel & Mandhyan, 2014). While NGO interventions can rebuild social capital and adaptive

behaviours in some cases (Patel & Bartlett, 2016), such successes remain limited, leaving most communities disconnected from formal or informal governance structures (Barnhardt, Field, & Pande, 2017).

Research highlights that social cohesion, safety, and secure livelihoods are essential preconditions for resilience in displaced communities (Kaluarachchi, 2018). When these are absent, incompatible social settings and curtailed access to resources create stressors that further strain community relationships. Strengthening social networks, rebuilding leadership, and fostering collective engagement are necessary for effective socio-economic integration and the long-term functionality of resettled communities.

In this context, the study examines the dynamics of community organization and development in the Ezhil Nagar resettlement colony, Chennai. It focuses on civic and social integration among resettled households, exploring participation in community institutions, drivers and barriers of engagement, and the implications for social and economic resilience. By situating civic participation and social cohesion as critical determinants of successful resettlement, this research contributes to broader discussions on urban displacement and the challenges of integrating resettled communities in India's rapidly transforming cities.

## II. Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods design. The settlement consists of 5,920 dwelling units across 43 blocks, of which Blocks 33–37 (656 units) was selected as the study cluster using a lot method. The quantitative source comprised a structured household survey, where the HH head or their spouse were the respondents. Although the target sample comprised 100 households (15% of total units), non-participation by some residents resulted in a final sample of 80 households, selected through simple random allocation. Focus group discussions with unemployed women, working men, working women, and children, IDIs with youth, and KIIs with development facilitators and grassroots-level community mobilizers and leaders constituted the qualitative data. Data was collected during March – April, 2023.

The study ensured that participants were informed of the study objectives and purpose to provide their consent. Child protection standards, parental consent and a community adult supervision was ensured while engaging children in the process. The identity of respondents was protected, and the information was use only for the disclosed purposes.

## III. Findings

### 3.1 History and demographic features of Ezhil Nagar Resettlement Colony

#### 3.1.1. Ezhil Nagar Resettlement Colony

Thuraipakkam Resettlement Colony is one of the largest state-led resettlement sites in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, administered by the Tamil Nadu Urban Habitat Development Board, which comprises of 3 contiguous settlements—Kannagi Nagar, Tsunami Quarters, and Ezhil Nagar. The study site, Ezhil Nagar, is the most recently developed settlement, with 43 blocks. Dwelling units vary by block, ranging from 96 to 178 units, each unit measures approximately 220 square feet containing a separate kitchen, one bedroom, a hall, an attached toilet, and access to a piped water supply.

Approximately 21.3% of households reside in rental units, and 41.2% of these rented households (8.8% of all respondents) consist of extended family members or adult children of original allottees. Among the surveyed households, 37.5% reside on the ground floor, 21.3% on the first floor, 20% on the second floor, 10% on the third floor, and 11.3% on the fourth floor.

#### 3.1.2. Demographic profile, Education and Livelihood Status

The study population of 348 individuals from 80 households comprised 46.6% males, 52.9% females, and 0.6% transgender individuals. Children and adolescents (0–17 years) constituted 41.9% of the population, including 5.7% aged 0–5 years, 12.6% aged 6–11 years, and 23.6% aged 12–17 years. The working-age population (18–50 years) accounted for 53.7%, with 8% aged 18–25 years and 45.7% aged 26–50 years. Only 4.3% were above 50 years. The vast majority (95.5%) identified as Hindu, with the remaining residents identifying as Christian.

School enrolment among children was comparatively high - 92.9% of those aged 6–17 years were enrolled, with slightly higher enrolment among boys (95%) than girls (90.9%). Enrolment in 6-11 age group is 97.7%—100% for boys and 96% for girls—supported by the availability of nearby primary schools in Kannagi Nagar. Among adolescents aged 12–17 years, 90.2% were enrolled, with a gender gap of 92.7% for boys and 87.8% for girls.

Nearly one-fifth of adults (18.1%) were illiterate, with illiteracy higher among men (25.3%) than women (12%). An additional 15% had only primary or below-primary education. The largest share (26.8%) had completed middle school, while 18.1% had reached secondary school. Higher secondary completion remained low at 6.3%. Only 12.2% were graduates and 3.4% held diplomas.

**Table 1**

Livelihood profile of adults (18 and above) by gender

Livelihood Option	Male	Female	Transgender	Total
Daily wages labour	43 (45.26%)	3 (2.78%)	0 (0.00%)	46 (22.44%)
Cleaning staff/housekeeping work	5 (5.26%)	3 (2.78%)	0 (0.00%)	8 (3.90%)
Unemployed	8 (8.42%)	48 (44.44%)	2 (100.00%)	58 (28.29%)
Student	5 (5.26%)	5 (4.63%)	0 (0.00%)	10 (4.88%)
Domestic help	0 (0.00%)	24 (22.22%)	0 (0.00%)	24 (11.71%)
Private salaried jobs	11 (11.58%)	13 (12.04%)	0 (0.00%)	24 (11.71%)
Government salaried jobs	0 (0.00%)	3 (2.78%)	0 (0.00%)	3 (1.46%)
Skilled labor (driver, electrician, plumber, etc.)	11 (11.58%)	3 (2.78%)	0 (0.00%)	14 (6.83%)
Self employed	1 (1.05%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	1 (0.49%)
Petty business	11 (11.58%)	6 (5.56%)	0 (0.00%)	17 (8.29%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>95 (100.00%)</b>	<b>108 (100.00)</b>	<b>2 (100.00%)</b>	<b>205 (100.00)</b>

As depicted in Table 1, informal employment options such as daily wage labour (22.44%), domestic work (11.71%), petty business (8.29%), and skilled trades like driving or electrical work (6.83%) together constitute nearly 50% of all adult livelihoods, indicating limited access to secure or regulated employment. Subsequently, formal livelihood engagements are limited, with only 11.71% of adults engaged in private salaried jobs and a further 1.46% in government positions.

Despite women’s comparatively high education attainments—11.1% at higher secondary and 17.6% at the graduate level—majority remain unemployed (44.44%) or confined to low-paying domestic work (22.22%). Even among women with secondary or higher education, 78.95% of those with secondary education, 83.33% of those with higher secondary education, and nearly half of graduates (47.37%) remain unemployed.

**3.2. Community participation in development facilitation interventions by government and non-government actors**

**3.2.1 Low Engagement in Government and Non-Government Development Processes**

A systematic disengagement from state-led civic and social organisations, including Residents’ Welfare Association (RWA), government-led development initiatives, the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme, and social welfare schemes was observed in Ezhil Nagar.

**Table 2**

State of civic associations and government-led development programmes

Development Engagement	Yes	No	Total
Government-led development initiatives	01 (1.3%)	79 (98.8%)	80 (100.0%)
Government welfare schemes	01 (1.3%)	79 (98.8%)	80 (100.0%)
Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs)	2 (2.5%)	78 (97.5%)	80 (100%)
ICDS (Applicable to families with children under 5 years of age)	10 (55.6%)	8 (44.4%)	18 (100%)

Table 2 shows, out of the total 80 households surveyed, only one family reported participation in any government-led development programme, and another one family reported access to welfare schemes. Similarly, only two families reported membership in a block-level RWA. Among 18 eligible households, 55.6% reported accessing ICDS centre services. Cumulatively, only 17.5% of families are engaged in any structured government-led development initiatives.

On the contrary, 37.5% of households in the study cluster participated in NGO-led activities. This is largely attributable to the majority of families from Saidapet, Chennai location in the study area, where a child sponsorship organization worked with the informal settlements and moved into the resettlement area to continue the sponsorship program. Furthermore, the NGOs working on children’s education and life skill development have their field offices close to the study cluster.

**3.2.2 Gaps in Awareness, Trust, and Program Continuity determining engagement**

Across all areas of engagement in government-led development facilitation models - Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs), ICDS services, and access to government welfare schemes—and NGO-level initiatives, the most prominent factor contributing to non-participation is the lack of awareness regarding available schemes, programmes, and the procedures for accessing or engaging with them. Responses such as “Don’t know” and “Not aware” were the recurring verbatim across multiple qualitative exercises.

The marked absence of participation in Residents’ Welfare Associations (RWAs) stems largely from the institutional non-existence of the RWA itself. Respondents repeatedly stated that the RWA “doesn’t exist” or that they had “not heard about it,” with only one respondent—identified as an RWA head in one of

the blocks—confirming its very recent formation (approximately three months prior).

Qualitative data highlighted the practical difficulties in establishing RWAs and recruiting members to it.

*Initially, we proposed collecting a small monthly subscription fee from RWA members in each block to support development activities coordinated by the association. However, we had to drop the idea because people were not willing to contribute or place their trust in the initiative, even though the amount was minimal” (RWA member from Ezhil Nagar in KII with community leader, dated 10 March 2023)*

Absence of continuity and accountability in government and civic initiatives also demotivates the residents. One resident’s observation—“Nobody really follows up on the (development facilitation) activities”—illustrates the broader problem of inadequate sustained engagement and limited follow-up support for resettled families. Such discontinuity significantly discourages residents from participating in development initiatives and welfare schemes.

*During COVID, the NULM staff supported us to start in-house livelihood activities, cash transfers from both government and non-government agencies were also there. However, there were no follow-up for the activities after that (FGD with women, Ezhil Nagar, dated 12 March 2023).*

The lack of follow-up activities demotivates participants, often leading to their withdrawal from similar programs. This jeopardizes future mobilization efforts, as institutional trust is eroded.

### **3.2.3 Outreach Gaps, Perceived Irrelevance, and Structural Barriers Limiting Engagement**

This theme is particularly evident in NGO-led development initiatives, where the respondents reported challenges related to outreach, participation, and perceived relevance. Although NGOs maintain a relatively higher presence in the study cluster, programme recruitment remains concentrated around the block where field offices are located. Grassroots facilitators reported that certain blocks are considered “violent,” “non-cooperative,” or “resistant to development engagement,” resulting in limited mobilization from those blocks. Residents corroborated these perceptions, noting, “*Nobody calls us or informs us about NGO activities,*” highlighting that program information is often confined to pre-existing social networks.

A notable group of residents self-exclude from programmes, citing lack of interest or perceived irrelevance to their needs they do not perceive themselves as intended beneficiaries. One participant stated, “*We are not that needy to participate,*” suggesting that NGO programmes are widely perceived as charity

for the “most needy,” leading those who consider themselves relatively self-sufficient to refrain from engagement.

Mobilising men and young adult males is particularly challenging. NGO representatives noted difficulties in involving adolescent boys due to their association with gangs, substance use, and preference for unstructured activities. Similarly, men often remain preoccupied after work, engaging in alcohol consumption or rest, limiting their interest in community activities.

*Most of the men will be busy after the week’s work schedule, may take alcohol, and take rest, thus they will not be interested in any activities, and nobody dares to call them (KII with community grassroot level facilitator, Ezhil Nagar dated 09 March 2023).*

A significant concern in government-level outreach is the lack of identity documents, particularly for those staying on rent. When residents move in as tenants, they face difficulties in updating their address, which obstructs their access to essential services and limits their opportunities to participate in welfare programmes. Additionally, some residents reported being excluded due to their non-permanent residency status, highlighting how institutional eligibility criteria can inadvertently marginalise vulnerable groups and hinder their participation in development initiatives.

### **3.2.4 Financial barriers for urban programming**

Fund availability is a serious barrier for NGO level outreach and scale. NGO leaders explained difficulties in mobilizing and sustaining donors for urban community development programs is challenging.

*Engaging a “floating” population complicates the demonstration of program outcomes—a mandatory requirement for securing funding, particularly from CSR donors. Consequently, interventions tend to focus on residents who are already accessible, limiting scale in participation. Long term engagement with urban communities is a challenge. (KII with NGO Development facilitator, dated 05 March 2023).*

They also added that programmes like child sponsorship can take a fixed number of beneficiaries preferably permanent residents as internal mobility, since it requires a periodic monitoring of the child’s progress for a longer term.

### **3.2.5 Lack of time for participation**

Resettlements necessitate long commutes involving multiple bus transfers due to the absence of direct transport links and poorly established labour markets and school facilities in the resettlement area. Respondents repeatedly stated that they lacked time due to livelihood pressures and the fatigue caused by longer commutes for work and education. Responses like “no time for community group activities and programmes” illustrate how economic deprivation and long working hours curtail residents’ ability to engage in community organisation efforts, including meetings,

committees, and community events.

**Table 3**

Travel distance for work by gender

Distance (km)	Male	Female	Total
0–2	14 (15.7%)	9 (15.0%)	23 (15.4%)
2–4	0 (0.0%)	9 (15.0%)	9 (6.0%)
4–6	28 (31.5%)	12 (20.0%)	40 (26.8%)
6–8	4 (4.5%)	27 (45.0%)	31 (20.8%)
8–10	19 (21.3%)	1 (1.7%)	20 (13.4%)
10–12	2 (2.2%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (1.3%)
12 kms and above	24 (27.0%)	0 (0.0%)	24 (16.1%)

As illustrated in Table 3, most working residents—regardless of gender—commute for their employment. These long, routine travel distances physically and mentally exhaust them, particularly the men, with more than 50% travelling 8–12 km. Women, although travelling shorter distances, face time constraints due to the combined demands of employment, caregiving, and domestic responsibilities, leaving limited scope for civic or collective engagement.

**3.2.6 Fear, Safety, and Social Environment as Barriers**

Social and environmental insecurity is another prominent factor affecting social and civic engagement in Ezhil Nagar. An overwhelming majority of respondents (95%) perceived the community as unsafe for themselves, while 91.3% felt that their children were also at risk. Widespread exposure to crime, substance abuse, and social disorder highlights that personal and community safety remains one of the most critical challenges faced by residents.

Table 4

Reported safety concerns and incidents

Safety Concerns	Frequency (%)
Feel unsafe in neighbourhoods	71(91.3%)
No safe recreational/play space for children	39(48.8%)
Gang violence	54(67.5%)
Theft	58(72.5%)
Robbery/Vandalism	52(65.0%)
Alcoholism and drug abuse	58(72.5%)
Sexual violence incidents (women and girls)	33 (41.25%)

High prevalence of crime and social disorder is evident, with theft (72.5%), alcoholism and drug abuse (72.5%), robbery and vandalism (65%), and gang violence (67.5%) commonly reported. Nearly half of respondents (48.8%) cited the absence of safe

recreational or play spaces for children, highlighting vulnerabilities for younger residents. Sexual violence incidents affecting women and girls were reported by 41.25% of participants, underscoring the gendered dimension of insecurity within the community.

Several residents explicitly reported avoiding public spaces and social interactions within the settlement due to frequent fights and perceived security risks. Illustrative statements included, “not used to going out and mingling with other community members,” and “neighbourhood fights turn violent, and thus we avoid going out for community events.” Participants emphasized that the high levels of violence and crime create a hostile environment, which discourages collective action and limits civic participation within the community.

**3.2.7 Lack of space for Social and community events**

Space is a notable limitation for development engagements and participation. The community lack safe communal spaces, the available open spaces are the roads between the lanes, which are exposed to open drainages and predominantly occupied by men, are unsuitable for community meetings and gatherings.

ICDS workers also highlighted the space constraint as major barrier in reach and scale.

*If we have more space in the centre, we could have enrolled more children in the ICDS centre; the children could have benefitted from the ECCD program and the feeding programs. If more centres are allotted for the settlement, it can benefit them more. (KII with ICDS workers, Ezhil Nagar, dated 10 March 2023).*

They noted that allocating additional centres would enable the organization of more community programmes, targeting children under five, pregnant and lactating mothers, and adolescent girls.

**3.3. Social Fragmentations that affect community organizations**

**3.3.1 Fragmented community relations**

Fragmented community relations and limited neighbourhood trust are key barriers to civic and socio-economic integration in the resettlement colony. While 57.5% of residents describe their relationships with neighbours as “cordial/friendly,” a substantial minority report purely transactional interactions (36.25%) or no relationship, often accompanied by fear or avoidance (6.25%). Residents tend to associate primarily with members from their former slum communities, or from the same caste groups, which reduces the social interactions in blocks with a mixed composition.

*We don't want to mix with our current neighbours. We don't know them well, and many don't have basic manners, maintain hygiene, or speak respectfully. They fight with us over small things. We prefer to be with our*

*own people from our earlier slum community. (FGD with children, Block 34, Ezhil Nagar, 10 March 2023)*

Caste-based prejudices and social judgments further shape neighbourhood dynamics, with residents frequently blaming neighbours for unhygienic practices, quarrels, and a general unwillingness to cooperate.

*Those people do not understand how to keep the premises clean and tend to leave garbage in the corridor. They refuse to use the designated waste collection boxes, and if we suggest otherwise, they start quarrelling. The corporation volunteers come every day to collect the garbage, but they simply do not bother to hand it over." (FGD with women, 12 March 2023)*

The vertical settlement layout exacerbates these challenges, as poorly ventilated and dimly lit verandas impede movement, while verbal, physical, and sexual abuse incidents discourage interaction. Over time, these spatial and social obstacles have fostered detachment and limited social cohesion, impeding collective engagement and community development initiatives.

### 3.3.2 Absence of Community Leadership

The absence of strong formal and informal community leadership is a critical barrier to civic and socio-economic integration, reflecting the deep social fragmentation in resettled communities. Survey data show that 95% of residents are unaware of any potential community leaders, with 68.8% stating they “don’t know” of any leaders and 26.3% asserting that “no leadership” exists. Only 5% acknowledged the presence of leadership.

Prior to relocation, informal community leaders—respected individuals who mediated disputes, organised collective actions, and maintained social cohesion—played a central role in neighbourhood solidarity. Former leaders lost legitimacy and influence after resettlement, expressing confusion and helplessness in addressing social tensions, crime, and interpersonal distrust.

*I once led our community in protests against the evictions and had their respect. Today, I can't even convince them to install safety grills or CCTV. No one attends meetings or wants to contribute. I try to warn the youth about gangs and drugs, but they don't listen. It feels like no one cares about our collective well-being anymore, and changing this has become very difficult (KII with community leader, Block 35, Ezhil Nagar, 10 March 2023)*

Focus group discussions corroborated this, noting that informal leaders lost their *selvak*—a Tamil term denoting authority and influence—after resettlement. Attempts to establish new leaders were largely unsuccessful, with residents failing to acknowledge or approve emerging figures. Political leaders, such as municipal councillors, are perceived as the de facto authority. No resident

identified community organisers, elders, SHG representatives, or RWA members as leaders.

### 3.3.3 Financial Vulnerabilities and Exclusion

As outlined in the socio-economic profile, livelihood vulnerability of the community is critical, with low level of education and gendered barriers on livelihood participation. Furthermore, only 43.8% of households have a secondary income source to buffer against emergencies. Most households (63.75%) earn between ₹10,001 and ₹15,000 per month, while 27.5% earn between ₹5,001 and ₹10,000, and only 12.5% of households earn above ₹25,000. Qualitative discussions revealed that families attribute the heightened impoverishment risks following resettlement to reduced livelihood opportunities and low wages.

Critical underemployment is evident among professionally qualified residents compelled to accept lower-paying or less skilled work, with relocations to Thuraipakkam, a predominantly non-commercial area. For instance, a former accountant reported that his monthly earnings fell from ₹15,000 to ₹5,000 following relocation, reflecting not only an economic setback but also a loss of professional status.

Access to both formal and informal savings mechanisms is critically low. Only 32.5% of households saves regularly. Access to formal savings through bank accounts (65.5%) and informal savings groups (15%) are limited. Reliable access to credit is inconsistent as reported by 77.5% of the households. Residents rely heavily on informal financial sources like moneylenders and financiers, supplemented by microfinance institutions and asset-based lending, particularly gold loans.

Economic vulnerability not only retards civic organization, but prevent their upward mobilities and coping mechanisms.

*We can neither make an improvement in current living conditions, nor leave the settlement now. Rent rates are higher in the locality and thus we have to stay in the settlement, adjusting to all the hardships. (FGD with unemployed women, Block 33, Ezhil Nagar, 12 March 2023)*

The responses indicate a deep sense of depression on their current living conditions. Residents pointed out that the economic vulnerabilities are the primary reason they remain in this unsafe, fragmented, and leaderless community. Although the accommodation is relatively affordable, high rents elsewhere prevent relocation. This inability to accumulate capital perpetuates economic insecurity and fosters profound feelings of depression and hopelessness regarding future prospects.

## IV. Discussion

The findings collectively illustrate how socio-economic integration in Ezhil Nagar is shaped by a complex interaction of spatial, structural, economic and social barriers. The community’s civic non-participation, leadership vacuum, and fear-driven

disengagement are rooted in the wider disruptions caused by spatial relocation. Displacement fundamentally reconfigured residents' everyday geographies, restricting their ability to navigate, organize, or influence their living environment. Space itself became a limiting factor—confining mobility, constraining association-building, and intensifying security risks. These spatial and structural pressures left residents with little capacity to reconstitute familiar social networks, while economic vulnerabilities further reduced their options for leaving or improving living conditions.

The administrative process of resettlement deepened these disruptions by failing to establish mechanisms for community re-organization or collective action. The absence of facilitated neighbourhood structures, combined with weak institutional outreach, allowed fragmentation to harden into long-term disarticulation. Newly formed vertical communities, assembled from heterogeneous backgrounds, were left without the transitional support needed to rebuild trust or re-establish shared norms. Pre-existing leadership structures collapsed within these shuffled allocations, leaving residents without internal anchors for social regulation or collective mobilisation. This leadership loss widened the civic vacuum and reinforced a sense of powerlessness within the community.

Institutional fragility further compounded these barriers. Weak outreach systems, selective enrolment practices, and inconsistent mobilization efforts created substantial obstacles to civic participation. The lack of sustained institutional presence, ineffective communication channels, and the near absence of civic organisations such as RWAs produced a persistent informational vacuum. Governance and administrative shortcomings left residents disconnected from both state structures and community-based mechanisms needed for collective action. In this context, non-participation in civic and government-led initiatives is more a reflection of structural exclusion than individual disengagement. The unsafe social environment further amplified this disconnect. High levels of crime, insecurity, and everyday conflict eroded neighbourhood trust and inhibited attempts at social cohesion. Fear—of violence, stigma, and threats to dignity—became a dominant force, suppressing interaction and participation. The emotional toll of insecurity manifested not only in immediate safety concerns but also in long-term anxieties about social mobility and alliance formation. As a result, residents' aspirations narrowed to securing basic safety measures rather than envisioning broader developmental or collective goals.

Economic vulnerability emerged as an equally constraining dimension of residents' lives. Reduced incomes, limited savings, and dependency on informal credit entrenched a cycle of financial fragility that impeded investment in future-oriented activities. Spatial relocation to the peripheries disrupted livelihood access,

while gendered norms further limited women's participation—the very group typically central to community-level development engagement. Without stable financial buffers or diversified income sources, households struggled to withstand shocks or support initiatives that could strengthen community structures. These extended commutes reduce the time available for personal, family, and community life, further constraining opportunities for civic participation and collective engagement.

Gender intersects critically with these economic and social challenges. Women—typically the most engaged participants in grassroots development efforts—face multiple barriers due to safety concerns, childcare responsibilities, and limited mobility in unsafe environments. These gendered vulnerabilities restrict their participation in livelihood activities and community engagements, weakening both household resilience and broader community organization. As a result, the potential for women-led networks or associations to strengthen community associations remains severely constrained.

Together, these patterns reveal a mutually reinforcing relationship between spatial displacement, social fragmentation, security challenges, and economic insecurity. Each dimension compounds the others, making community organization and civic engagement exceptionally difficult. The findings underscore that resettlement, when approached as a purely physical relocation, can inadvertently produce long-term social disintegration. Any future interventions must therefore recognize that rebuilding community structures requires deliberate facilitation, sustained institutional presence, and targeted support that addresses spatial, social, and economic vulnerabilities simultaneously.

## V. Conclusions

In conclusion, transforming Ezhil Nagar and similar urban resettlement colonies into self-sustainable urban communities requires a dual approach. Internally, their critical challenges of safety, communication, and the leadership crisis must be addressed. Externally, urban resettlement policies must fundamentally change, moving beyond mere relocation to actively counter the social and economic fragmentation they create. This demands a proactive strategy of planned community organization and development facilitation to rebuild the social fabric.

Strengthening community structures and engagement by implementing long-term facilitation and support for organizations such as RWAs and SHGs, with leadership development and conflict-mediation to rebuild social networks would be a strategic approach in this regard. Ensuring safety and security in the settlement through infrastructure upgradations including surveillance, block-level community watch programs, and coordinated policing is essential. Immediate efforts should target improving economic stability of the households with enhanced access to savings- credit options. Addressing the intersectional

challenges of gender should be a cross-cutting strategy, addressing women's mobility, safety, childcare, and participation challenges.

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Prior to this, Sunitha spent over a decade at World Vision India, serving in roles such as Evaluations Specialist, Research Coordinator, and program coordinator. As an Evaluations Specialist, she led end-of-program evaluations and meta-syntheses at the national level, covering diverse themes such as Maternal and Child Health (MCHN), Education, Child Protection, and Economic Development. She played a pivotal role during humanitarian crises, engaging in rapid assessments for emergency responses to floods and the COVID-19

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Sunitha possesses robust technical skills in Social Return on Investment (SROI) and data analytics, utilizing tools such as Python, R, SPSS, STATA, and NVIVO.

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She is a prolific writer with publications in journals by Springer, Taylor & Francis, and Routledge, addressing diverse topics such as the intersectional vulnerability of domestic workers, the impact of COVID-19 on child health, and the political ecology of high-speed rail development.