

# Citizen's ◀ Report

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## The Truth Behind **PERUMBAKKAM**

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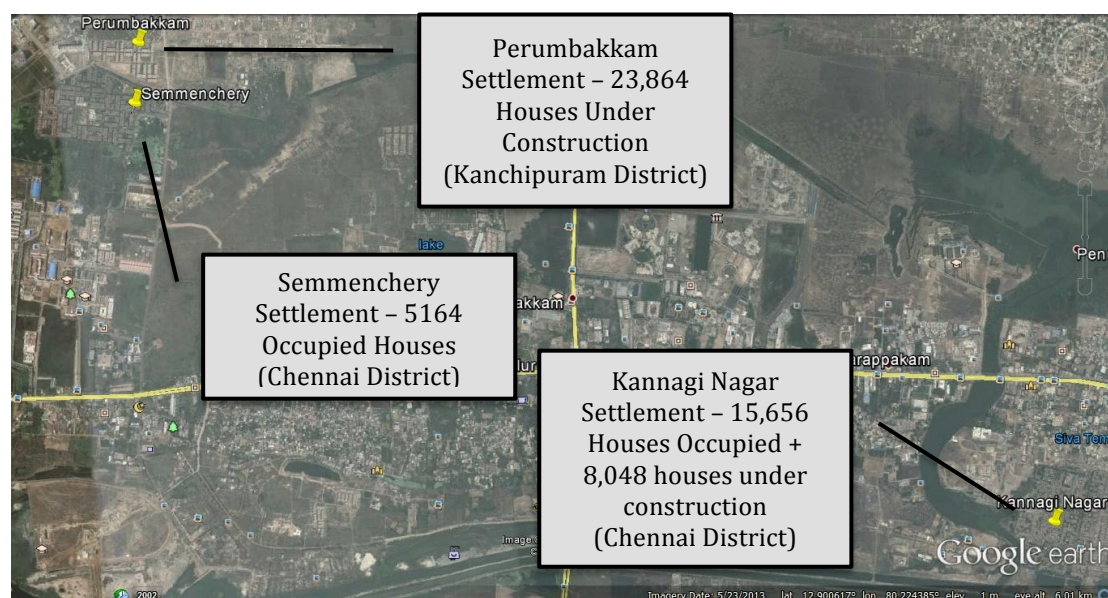
## The Truth Behind Perumbakkam – A Citizens’ Report

**Background Information:** The Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board (TNSCB) is constructing over 20,000 tenements in Perumbakkam, Kanchipuram District. Slum dwellers from Chennai city are to be resettled there. The project has been funded by the Basic Services for the Urban Poor (BSUP) component of the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM).

The details of the Perumbakkam tenements as specified on a TNSCB display board on the site are as follows<sup>1</sup>:

Perumbakkam (Ground +7) Housing Programme -Funded by JNNURM		
Location/Phase	Number of Houses	Budget (in Lakhs)
Perumbakkam I	10,452	44061.19
Perumbakkam II	9,476	37423.89
Ezhil Nagar (Perumbakkam)	3,936	17535.88
<b>Total</b>	<b>23,864</b>	<b>99020.96</b>

The housing project falls within the Perumbakkam Village of Kanchipuram District. It is located behind the existing relocation settlement of Semmenchery and around nine kilometers from the resettlement site of Kannagi Nagar. About 20,820 households have already been resettled in Kannagi Nagar and Semmenchery. Another 31,912 households will be evicted and shifted to Perumbakkam<sup>2</sup> and the planned expansion of Kannagi Nagar<sup>3</sup> once construction is over. Thus, when occupancy in these new tenements is



<sup>1</sup> As noted on November 11, 2013

<sup>2</sup> 23,864 tenements constructed at Perumbakkam under BSUP – Policy Note 2013-2014, Department of Housing and Urban Development

<sup>3</sup> 6,000 tenements constructed at Ezhil Nagar, Okkiyum Thoraipakkam (Adjacent to Kannagi Nagar) under JNNURM and 2,048 tenements at Ezhil Nagar, Okkiyum Thoraipakkam under the World Bank funded Emergency Tsunami Recovery Project – Policy Note 2013-2014, Department of Housing and Urban Development

complete, over 52,000 slum households in total will have been evicted from their original places of habitation in Chennai city, and resettled in these large-scale resettlement colonies.

As talks of imminent evictions were making the rounds in the city, a team got together to investigate the legal and policy background against which these tenements were constructed. This is a summary of the key findings from our investigation:

## **Key Findings:**

### **1. Perumbakkam housing is a replication of a failed model.**

The various persistent problems in the large-scale resettlement colonies built so far, Kannagi Nagar and Semmenchery, have been acknowledged by the government. In the year 2010, the Principal Secretary to Government, Home Department, Government of Tamil Nadu (GoTN), in reference to the en masse housing programme in Kannagi Nagar and Semmenchery<sup>4</sup>, had clearly pointed out that “this kind of concentration of slum population in one place is not desirable and that future programmes should ensure that they are more distributed and there is mixed development.” He stated that smaller plots of land should be provided to the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board (TNSCB) for rehabilitation and resettlement (R&R) schemes at different places in the city for this purpose. The Managing Director (MD), TNSCB also stated that when such huge resettlement projects are taken up, “there is a need for service delivery; otherwise it brings a bad name to the government as well as renders the entire process in-fructuous given that these people are the most disadvantaged sections who have been deprived of their livelihood and also have been moved out of their homes within the city.”<sup>5</sup>

The Government of Tamil Nadu is aware of these issues and have undertaken various attempts to address the various gaps in these housing programmes. The Chief Secretary to the Government, in a meeting dated 1 March 2010, had commissioned the formation of a high level committee (officially formulated by the Government Order (MS) No. 117; Dated: 26.08.2011, Housing and Urban Development (SC1 (2)) Department) to prepare a set of guidelines/norms to be followed whenever a rehabilitation and resettlement scheme for 5,000 households is proposed. He stated, “Given that there are 5,000 households, (25,000 population) all the facilities necessary/infrastructure, funding, staffing, operation and management issues related to this and delivery of services by the local bodies and all other departments should be included as part of the package and the committee should come up with a set of norms for this purpose.”

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<sup>4</sup> Kannagi Nagar and Semmenchery are massive housing programmes initiated by the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board to resettle slum dwellers residing in “objectionable locations” in Chennai and relocated in Kanchipuram District. Earlier these settlements were located in Kanchipuram District and after the expansion of the Corporation of Chennai they are now located in Zone XIV of the Corporation of Chennai.

<sup>5</sup> Minutes of the meeting held by the Chief Secretary to the Government in the Chief Secretary's Conference Hall, at 3:30 pm on 1.03.2010, regarding infrastructure facilities to be provided in Okkiyum Thoraipakkam, Semmenchery and Perumbakkam Schemes of TNSCB.

Despite having set-up a high level committee in the year 2011 to formulate a policy, till date, there is no clear-cut, common policy or guidelines at the state-level governing the rehabilitation and resettlement practices processes of the Government of Tamil Nadu. The current resettlement and rehabilitation practices of the government are diverse in nature, based on the development project that causes the eviction. R&R action plans are drafted on a case-by-case basis because no overarching common policy governs evictions and resettlement in the city. Several press reports and fact-finding reports by groups in the city reveal the poor quality of life in these resettlement colonies characterized by poor access to basic services, high crime rates, lack of social infrastructure, livelihood and educational opportunities. Many communities report having paid a high down payment upon moving into the houses despite the fact that many essential services including water and electricity supply were not provided at the time of moving. Less than 50% of the tenements in Kannagi Nagar are even occupied by the original beneficiaries<sup>6</sup>. Despite the fact that GoTN is aware of the gaps in the en masse housing programmes in Kannagi Nagar and Semmenchery (including deprivation of livelihood as stated by the MD of TNSCB), the TNSCB has constructed more such homes in Perumbakkam to resettle the slum families living in “objectionable locations” as part of the Basic Services for Urban Poor (BSUP) scheme under Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM).

## **2. Governance related issues in Kannagi Nagar and Semmenchery are likely to persist in Perumbakkam**

It is to be noted that governance related issues have also cropped up in Kannagi Nagar and Semmenchery, and are likely to persist in Perumbakkam. In the meeting conducted by the Principal Secretary to Government, Home Department, Government of Tamil Nadu (GoTN), in reference to the en masse housing programme in Kannagi Nagar and Semmenchery<sup>7</sup> constructed in then-village panchayats<sup>8</sup>, the Secretary to Government, Housing and Urban Development Department stated that TNSCB has created infrastructures like roads, street lights, storm water drains, underground sewerage etc. and handed them to the concerned local bodies for maintenance. However, the local bodies were unable to maintain them. Therefore, the infrastructure and solid waste management is being looked after by the TNSCB. The TNSCB has neither the resources nor the manpower to maintain the facilities as it is not a local body.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/chennai/50-beneficiaries-missing-from-tenements/article4006818.ece>

<sup>7</sup> Kannagi Nagar and Semmenchery are massive housing programmes initiated by the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board to resettle slum dwellers residing in “objectionable locations” in Chennai and relocated in Kanchipuram District. Earlier these settlements were located in Kanchipuram District and after the expansion of the Corporation of Chennai they are now located in Zone XIV of the Corporation of Chennai.

<sup>8</sup> Since the expansion of the city boundaries in 2011, both resettlement colonies now fall within the jurisdiction of the Corporation of Chennai.

He said if it is not possible for the Rural Development and Panchayat Raj department, then the TNSCB should be authorized to maintain the necessary infrastructure with given necessary funds<sup>9</sup>.

In response, the Secretary to Government, Rural Development and Panchayat Raj department stated that the panchayats are basically unable to deliver the services for the following reasons. These have to be considered carefully as they can be expected to arise in Perumbakkam as well:

- The respective panchayat did not have the necessary funds, as the State Finance Commission (SFC)<sup>10</sup> allotted grants to the panchayat based on the population according to Census 2001. TNSCB tenements in this area were not taken into account during fund allocation as the people were relocated after the census and the TNSCB had taken very few efforts to ensure that the panchayat raj department was informed of the same.
- The panchayat were not able to tax the residents to fund service delivery because there are issues related to ownership of land and houses. Residents are given hire-purchase agreements, which do not allow for land, water and other basic taxation that is applicable for other residents of the city. Any taxation even if possible, would be too meagre to render all the services required for these large populations on the site, unless budgetary provisions are made for the panchayat to provide services.

Apart from these, the people were moved from Chennai to Kanchipuram District at the time of relocation. The social security schemes including Old Age Pension (OAP), widow pension and other welfare schemes applicable for residents of Kannagi Nagar and Semmenchery living below poverty line continue to vest with Kanchipuram Collectorate, despite the settlements now falling within city limits. People find themselves not knowing which office to go to, to access these documents, or running between the various offices to get things done. The same issues will arise in Perumbakkam which lies in Kanchipuram District, and is outside of the expanded Corporation boundaries. Till these jurisdiction issues are sorted out, there should be a ban on resettlement to locations outside the city. The trauma of resettlement will be compounded by the lack of adequate services and problematic service delivery at the resettlement colonies.

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<sup>9</sup> Minutes of the meeting held by the Chief Secretary to the Government in the Chief Secretary's Conference Hall, at 3:30 pm on 1.03.2010, regarding infrastructure facilities to be provided in Okkiyum Thoraipakkam, Semmenchery and Perumbakkam Schemes of TNSCB.

<sup>10</sup> State Finance Commissions (SFC) has been established in the various states of India so that they can help in improving the financial condition of the various local bodies such as Panchayati raj institutions and municipal bodies that are there in the states. Another function of SFC is to allot funds to the various Panchayati raj institutions and municipal bodies in the state from the Consolidated Fund of the State

**3. Despite the JNNURM's explicit emphasis on in situ development, over 77% of the funds allotted to Chennai under the BSUP component have gone towards construction of the Perumbakkam tenements.**

The release of JNNURM funds is linked to three mandatory pro-poor reforms that states were required to implement. The most important of these was the provision of tenure security and access to basic services such as water and sanitation.

However, tenure security has been provided in a very limited manner in Chennai, through the provision of hire-purchase or lease-cum-sale deeds to households who will be moved to these resettlement colonies (Transparent Chennai 2012). Hire-purchase agreements are problematic because there is no guarantee that a sale deed will be given. Across many slum households in Chennai, residents are yet to receive their sale deeds despite having paid their dues towards the house. In any case, due to the limited number of units in resettlement colonies, even this form of tenure security is only available to a small percentage of the urban poor.

Most importantly, despite the JNNURM's explicit preference for in situ development and provision of houses close to places of occupation, over 77% of the BSUP funds available for Chennai has been spent on constructing tenements in Perumbakkam, which is 30 kilometres away from the centre of the city. Resettlement has received thrice as much investment as opposed to in situ improvements (Rs. 1073.19 crores vs. Rs. 315.08 crores).

There has also been an emphasis on construction of houses as opposed to the provision of basic services, as is required under the JNNURM.

**4. No public consultation has been held for this project, and no Social Impact Assessment.**

No public consultation has been conducted for this housing project yet. According to correspondence from the State Level EIA Authority to engineers at the TNSCB, the Environmental Impact Assessment Notification of 2006 (henceforth, the EIA) exempts public consultations for activities related to construction of development projects and townships. Surprisingly, such projects ('construction/township/commercial complexes/housing') require prior environmental clearance, but are exempted from both scoping and public consultation<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> The Perumbakkam project falls under the "B1" category as per 8 (b) of the Schedule of the EIA Notification 2006, because it is a project "covering an area  $\geq$  50 ha and or built up area  $\geq$  1,50,000 sq.mtrs++". The correspondence dated 11.12.2008, (Reference Number: SEIAA/TN/EC/8 (b)/023/F.148/2008) from the Director of Environment and Tamil Nadu Member Secretary, State Level Environment Impact Assessment Authority Tamil Nadu to the Executive Engineer, Division II, M/s. Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board states that for this reason, the project does not require a public consultation as per Para 7 (i) III. Stage (3) (d) "Public Consultation" of Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, 2006.

Ironically, these kinds of “developmental projects” that cause many of the evictions of the poor from the city are the ones that are exempt from public consultation, thus giving a free rein to private real estate developers to take over lands without considering the impact on the users of these lands. Though public consultation has been exempted under the EIA Notification, the National Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy (NRRP) 2007 that was in force when the site was constructed mandates the following:

- When a project involves involuntary displacement of four hundred or more families en masse, an Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) and a Social Impact Assessment (SIA) has to be undertaken.
- Public hearings should be organised where in the EIA and the SIA should be shared with the project-affected people.
- The government has to specify the ameliorative measures for the issues identified by the communities in the SIA.
- The NRRP also mandates that an independent multi-disciplinary expert group constituted by the Government should examine the SIA and this has also not been followed in any of the process.

However, our interaction with the officials reveal that till date SIA has not been conducted for the Perumbakkam site and the above mentioned processes have also been sidelined. Thus public consultation has been ignored in the planning as well as the implementation process of the Perumbakkam Housing scheme.

## **5. Special Component Plan (SCP) funds have been utilized for the ghettoization of the urban poor.**

Funds from the Special Component Plan have been used for the construction of these tenements in Perumbakkam. Under the JnNURM, the central government provides financial support for infrastructure development in cities, with state and city government required to contribute a portion of funds towards the development as well. G.O. Ms. No. 45 (Municipal Administration {MA2} and Water Supply, Dated 2.2.2011) points out that 26% of the additional state share for first installment (that is, Rs. 1905.98 lakhs of Rs. 7308 lakhs) has been allocated under the Special Component Plan.

The Special Component Plan is allotted for the development of SC/ST populations as they have ‘historically suffered from enormous disadvantages and development deficit as compared to the rest of the population’. The SCP was introduced during the sixth plan period to ensure that a portion of the total plan outlay of the State is apportioned exclusively for the SC/ST groups based on the proportion of their population in the state. SCP seeks to improve the living conditions, education, and participation of SC/ST groups<sup>12</sup> through programmes for raising their income and creating assets; basti-oriented schemes for infrastructure development through provision of drinking water

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<sup>12</sup> Scheduled Caste Sub Plan – Guidelines for Implementation – Planning Commission, 2006, New Delhi - [http://planningcommission.nic.in/sectors/sj/SCSP\\_TSP%20Guidelines.pdf](http://planningcommission.nic.in/sectors/sj/SCSP_TSP%20Guidelines.pdf)

supply, link roads, house-sites, housing etc. and educational and social development activities like establishment of primary schools, health centers, vocational centers, community halls, places for women, etc.

The use of SCP funds to build tenements in Perumbakkam asserts that the housing project will cater to SC populations from the slums of Chennai. However, a project that pushes the scheduled castes and tribes (who perhaps migrated to the city in search of better opportunities) from Chennai city back to a village panchayat cannot be classified as “development”. Especially considering the lack of livelihood opportunities, educational opportunities and access to basic services that has plagued the resettlement colonies built so far, the State has made use of SCP funds to aid a regressive project that makes the marginalized only more vulnerable.

**6. Land use classification of the lands on which these tenements have been built is unclear. It seems that agricultural land has been used for this housing project.**

For a housing project as large as Perumbakkam, it is important to examine the land that has been utilized. The land use classification of the lands used for the housing project seems unclear. A letter to the TNSCB contains the survey numbers of these lands<sup>13</sup>. It is noteworthy that some of these lands (survey numbers 542, 543, 544 and 546) are agricultural land converted for primary residential use (GoTN Gazette Date: 11.08.2010) as per the CMDA Land Use Maps.<sup>14</sup>

S.No.	Authority Resolution	Block No.	Survey No.	Land Use Reclassification		TN Govt. Gazette date	PA (GIS)	AP	DP	SP
				From	To					
1	80 / 2010, 28.05.10	-	542, 543, 544 & 546	Agricultural	PR	11.08.10	Sd/-	Sd/-	Sd/-	Sd/- 18.10.10

Figure 1: Excerpt of the Master Plan for CMA 2026: Map of Perumbakkam

Thus, land use classification has been changed in order to accommodate tenements for the urban poor at Perumbakkam. To serve its own interests, the government seems willing to change the classification of land on which it wants to erect tenements. However, this sort of concession is not made for slum dwellers who seek rights for the land they have been living on for over 30

<sup>13</sup> Letter dated 11.12.2008, Reference Number: SEIAA/TN/EC/8 (b)/023/F.148/2008, to the Executive Engineer, Division II, M/s. Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board from the Director of Environment and Tamil Nadu Member Secretary, State Level Environment Impact Assessment Authority Tamil Nadu. The relevant survey numbers are 479/2, 482, 483,484, 485, 508, 509, 510, 511, 516, 517, 518, 523, 524/1, 524/2, 527, 528, 538, 539/2, 540/1, 541, 542, 543, 544 and 546

<sup>14</sup> Proposed land Use 2026 for Perumbakkam (Second Master Plan) <http://www.cmdamaps.tn.nic.in/pdflinkcombine.php?lbcodes=40&vname=Perumbakkam,MP>



years. In order to free up land within the city for various projects, the urban poor continue to be routinely evicted to be resettled in the fringes of the city. Thus it seems that state machinery is selectively flexible, to service the interests of the government and the elite, but not for the benefit of the urban poor.

There is still some ambiguity about the land classification. Interaction with local residents of Perumbakkam and verification of existing documents reveals that lands with the survey numbers 542, 543 and 544 are classified as dry lands (Tharisu Nilam) in 2009, by the Block Development Office<sup>15</sup>, whereas in the land classification map of CMDA, these survey numbers are classified as agriculture land in 2010. Our visit reveals that different departments classify the lands of the same survey numbers differently.

In a project that not only involves high costs, but also the potential eviction and resettlement of thousands of families, there does not seem to be enough clarity and transparency. The government must make these details of the project open to the public.

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Against this problematic legal and policy context, construction of these tenements at Perumbakkam is continuing in full swing. About 6,000 houses have been constructed so far in G+7 buildings. The fact-finding team paid a visit to the site to inspect the buildings, and the following are our observations:

## **7. People have been treated as lab rats to be experimented with, in flawed buildings.**

Of the proposed 23,864 tenements nearly 6000 tenements have been completed so far. TNSCB seems to be experimenting with various iterations of building design, and correcting design faults in the construction of subsequent buildings without correcting them in the previous buildings.

There are two types of buildings:

- In the first type of building, the stairs run around the lift. In case of fire, the lift will act as a duct, and people will not be able to use the stairs. The stairs are very narrow (2.5 feet), and the building is very poorly lit. The houses span 390 sq. ft. plinth area.
- In the second type of building, the mistakes of the first kind of building have been addressed to some extent. The stairs are separate from the lift. In order to better ventilate the building, there are open-to-sky spaces in the corridors. (However, the residents may close these spaces after occupation for their own use). The social space (width of the corridors and stairs) is more, but the

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<sup>15</sup> Response by the Block Development Office (Tambaram) to the petition under Right to Information Act – 2005 (dated 30/06/2009; Ref No: 8072/2009)

houses are smaller, spanning only 310 sq. ft. The building remains poorly ventilated.

- Future buildings will only comprise half the number of houses in the previous two types of buildings so that the problem of poor ventilation may be addressed.

The people are construed as lab rats to be experimented on as the errors in building design have been identified only after the completion of the construction work of these buildings. Though efforts are being taken to address some of the mistakes in the design of the buildings to be built in the future, no efforts are being taken to correct the errors in buildings already constructed. Thus, the people who are assigned to houses in these buildings have to live with these inconveniences.

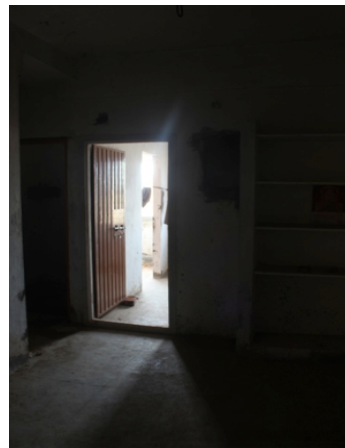
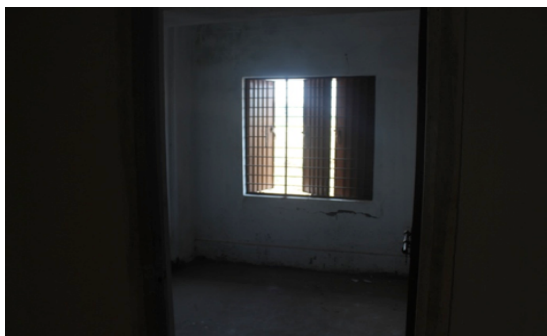
Considering that the building designs were approved by the CMDA, the flaws in the designs that were discovered *after* construction seriously challenge the credibility of the designing process and the design approval process.

## 8. The design of the houses renders them uninhabitable

The design of the houses has a number of flaws upon inspection:

- No ample lighting inside the houses: The houses are very poorly lit. Even during a visit to the site between 11 am to 2 pm, the houses (in both kinds of buildings) were engulfed in darkness. In order to improve the ventilation and lighting open-to-sky spaces were introduced in the second design yet the lighting has not improved much.

: Type 1 House - Interior



Type 2 The lengthy dark corridor



- Narrow staircases and inadequate exit options, especially in case of an emergency: There are 24 houses in each floor of the Perumbakkam buildings, across 8 floors (ground floor plus seven storeys). There are about 192 tenements in each building, that is about 750 individuals in each building. For the people who will be residing in the 7 floors (other than the ground floor) there are two elevators and two sets of narrow staircases that are 2.5 meters wide each. The staircases are too narrow for all the individuals in the building to use. The stairs in the first type of building cannot be used during a fire because of their position around the lift duct. The building holds nearly 750 people, and in case of a fire or earthquake, it would be very difficult for people to use such narrow staircases as escape routes. There are no emergency exits in a building that has G+7 floors.

There are also only two elevators in a building housing 750 people across so many floors. One also does not know enough about maintenance arrangements for all infrastructure on the site, especially elevators which are important in buildings with eight floors. Past experience has shown that elevators in public spaces like MRTS stations have not been maintained in working order. Most importantly, elevators cannot be used in the case of a fire or natural disaster. Thus, the buildings are not designed to cope in the event of an emergency.

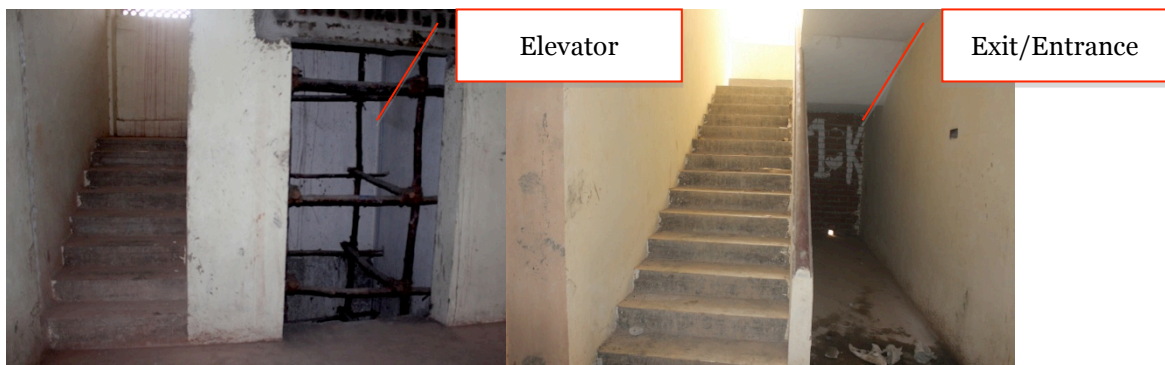


Figure 2: Earlier version of the building

Figure 2: Latest version after redesigning of the building

- The design of the buildings and houses do not accommodate the convenience of the residents: People's livelihoods have not been considered in the designing process. People involved in head-load vending (vendors who carry their products on their head and sell it on a door to door basis) or carpentry would find it difficult to carry equipment up such narrow staircases if the lift is not working.

Design of the houses also seem to be inconsiderate. The kitchen window opens out to the toilet ventilator. Residents are likely to face problems of stench from the toilet floating into the kitchen. Discussion with women in slums, who had visited Perumbakkam, reveal that they are not comfortable with this design that the



TNSCB has adopted. Moreover, there has been no consultation with the communities about the design of the house.

- The site layout: One of the main causes of concern is the site layout. The buildings are too close to each other: there are many dark corners in the settlement that can render the settlement unsafe for the women. This issue has come up in Kannagi Nagar repeatedly in the past.



- The quality of construction: There were visible cracks in the building even at the construction stage. Patch works have been undertaken to cover the cracks in some of the buildings. The metals frames for doors and windows in the houses were rusted. Some frames were not fixed properly either.



- Space allocated for social amenities in the layout is inadequate: In response to a RTI petition in November 2010 the TNSCB has stated that there would be one 50-bed hospital, 20 ICDS centres, five primary schools, two high schools and two higher secondary schools apart from the various other services that are to be provided. However, for a population of nearly 95,000 people who are to be accommodated in the tenements, these services will not be adequate. Based on the population norms there should be a minimum of 118 ICDS centres, yet space has been allotted only for 20. Similarly, the population of school-going children will be about 20%, ie, 19000 students. For this, there is a need for at least 11 schools of about 2000-student capacity. However, there is a provision for only 9 schools in the layout.

It is also worth noting that with evictions being imminent for slum communities across the city for resettlement in Perumbakkam, no social infrastructure is in place yet. No arrangements have been made for transport facilities for the incoming families either. They may have to rely on infrastructure in Semmenchery until arrangements are made for them.

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An examination of the various issues that have emerged from the settlement even prior to occupancy shows us that Government of Tamil Nadu has failed to learn from the previous mistakes in Kannagi Nagar and Semmenchery. It is now replicating the same flawed model on a larger scale without considering the human cost of resettlement.

We urge the Government of Tamil Nadu not to relocate the people to these houses, as they are not fit for habitation.

The construction work at Perumbakkam settlement should be stopped immediately till the issues highlighted in this report are addressed.

We urge the high-level committee to convene a meeting to discuss the various pitfalls of the housing project. The minutes of the meeting and the plan of action must be made available to the general public and the potential beneficiaries of this project before further work on the site. A public consultation must be held to solicit the opinions of the vulnerable populations, activists and NGOs.

The houses constructed in Perumbakkam reiterate the fact that services for the poor are often poor.