UNEMPLOYMENT, SERVICE PROVISION AND VIOLENCE REDUCTION POLICIES IN URBAN MAHARASHTRA

Addressing and Mitigating Violence

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With almost 40 per cent of its urban population living in slums, the state of Maharashtra faces a severe problem of inadequate housing and urban planning. The acute inequalities that characterise current Maharashtra's urban development leave many people suffering from inadequate housing, poor service provision, lack of access to health and sanitation, overcrowded spaces, and limited employment opportunities. With urbanisation poised to increase dramatically over the next decades in India, it is urgent to remedy the current situation lest the social ills associated with unbalanced urbanisation grow worse.

Urban impoverished areas in India also tend to be sites persistently afflicted by outbreaks of riots and crime. Maharashtra has become one of the states most affected by civil violence in India. According to official data, while rioting has fallen since the 1990s across India, Maharashtra is an exception, experiencing approximately 6,000 riots per year. In recent years, large-scale rioting has broken out in several towns in Maharashtra, including Pusad, Sangli, Kolhapur and Dhule, leading to several deaths, injuries and displaced people.

The linkages between civil violence and pockets of acute urban vulnerability are complex. Joining in violent activities is sometimes an urban survival strategy for the most vulnerable as the lack of opportunities in the legal sector push young people into criminal networks. In addition, the coexistence of the very rich and the very poor within a small geographical area is liable to generate frustrations and aggression. The inadequacy of service provision and the extreme contest for resources it creates is also likely to fuel crime and violence. When these tensions coincide with ethnicity or religion markers, the potential for communal violence rises considerably.

There is a wide agreement that civil violence happens mostly in impoverished urban areas. However, the linkages between urban violence and vulnerability are seldom tackled in a systematic manner at the policy level. Policy discussions about civil violence tend to revolve around how to maintain communal harmony, and much less so on how urban violence may be shaped by urban vulnerability. It is thus unsurprising that the main policies of law and order agencies fail to encompass violence in its broader social and economic context. Conversely, efforts to tackle urban vulnerability – such as slum policies – do not in general address its links with violence and physical insecurity.

This report argues that the interconnection of crime, violence and vulnerability has to be explicitly recognised for both development and security policies to succeed. Efforts to improve the security of vulnerable urban populations must include physical insecurity at the margin by focusing on social, economic or legal insecurity. Likewise, the rise of violent outbreaks in areas characterised by fast urbanisation, in India and elsewhere, poses serious constraints to development policies as recognised in the recent *World Development Report* (World Bank 2011).

This report analyses the relationship between violence and economic vulnerability among urban populations in the Indian state of Maharashtra. It draws on: the results of a large-scale household and neighbourhood survey in urban Maharashtra conducted by Gupte *et al.* in 2010; a policy roundtable held in January 2013 in Mumbai involving key actors of slum and violence-reduction policies; a series of participatory exercises on the issue of safety in slum areas in Mumbai; and an extensive review of existing academic literature and policy documents.

The main findings of the report are as follows:

- Civil violence in Maharashtra is deeply rooted in processes of urban vulnerability. This manifests itself in three ways: (1) violence-prone areas are also very disenfranchised, consisting mostly of slums; (2) among violence-prone areas, those where the lack of services, employment opportunities and social capital are most severe are also those most acutely affected by violence; and (3) within these areas, it is the most economically, socially and spatially vulnerable households that suffer most from bouts of civil violence.

- Violence and poverty reduction policies are disjointed, despite the close relationship observed between violence and economic vulnerability. Initiatives aimed at preventing civil violence consist mostly of government or civil society efforts to foster communal harmony. For the most part, these policies do not directly address broader issues of urban vulnerability. Conversely, attempts to reduce poverty within high-profile policy agendas, such as slum relocation policies, do not consider the issue of violence and safety with the attention it deserves. Slum relocation and resettlement policies focus on granting property rights to slum dwellers. Yet other sources of vulnerability can be more important than tenure security. Current policies run the risk of failing to reduce vulnerabilities and increasing exposure to violence if the needs of local people are not taken into account.

- The state and other actors should stop seeing slums as 'dens of crime' but rather recognise that they can be both vibrant economic environments and places where people need protection the most. The problems of under-policing, unemployment or lack of services in slums ultimately stem from the powerlessness of slum dwellers who find it hard to connect with state authorities. Enhancing the participation of slum dwellers is thus required to tackle both vulnerabilities and violence in an integrated and efficient way.

- Initiatives to enhance slum dwellers' participation in decision-making are welcome. There is a need for slum dwellers and the police to actively engage with each other to strengthen safety in impoverished neighbourhoods. Schemes such as the Slum Police Panchayat (SPP), where police officers and representatives of slum dwellers come together on a long-term basis to solve local disputes, are a step in the right direction. However, these initiatives are seldom rolled out in urban areas other than Mumbai and generally remain fragile as long as they are not institutionalised. Their merits and limitations should also be more rigorously evaluated.