

Mumbai: The Redevelopment of Dharavi

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Following an impressive accumulation of awards for the hit film “Slumdog Millionaire”, the world’s attention has been turned to the sprawling slums of India which comprised a large portion of the film’s setting. The film depicts the squalid conditions and struggle for survival in the Dharavi slum, but ultimately leaves the audience with a sense of optimism from its people and desire to believe things may eventually turn out for the better there.

While the ending is certainly heart-warming, it is more to the benefit of the globally neglected Dharavi residents to take a critical perspective and delve into the Indian government’s plans for land use, infrastructural development and proposed future housing schemes for the “hutment” residents. But in an effort to realize lasting positive change and provoke progress, the indigenous economy must not be ignored. The hectic pace of economic activity in the urban slums of India gives jobs and livelihood to the millions that gravitate towards it from all parts of India. A highly productive and thriving economic hub, the Dharavi slum is an interesting study in ingenuity, perseverance, and hope and its future is an interesting study in the politics of land use.

Mumbai

Mumbai’s development is relatively recent having sprung up from marshy lands occupied by a thriving fishing industry to a city of 16 million people in just 300 years. The earliest fishing villages and mangrove marshes were joined by European traders and, in later centuries, the swelling fortunes of the British in India and the growing importance of Mumbai as a port and trading center drew waves of immigrants looking for a better life.



Today Mumbai is the commercial and entertainment center of India, generating 5% of India’s GDP and accounting for over 25% of industrial output, around 40% of maritime trade, and an astounding 70% of capital transactions to India’s economy. However, juxtaposed against a backdrop of towering business buildings and economic renovation is Dharavi, one of the world’s largest slums and a difficult situation to ameliorate from anyone’s perspective.

The Slum

Dharavi was once an isolated settlement on the outskirts of Mumbai. It was unwanted land, rendered useless (due to the difficulty in traversing its swamps and marshes), except for its wildlife and the fishing village located near



it. Since then, Dharavi has developed into a crowded collection of over 80 neighborhoods. These neighborhoods house an approximate 500,000 to 1,000,000 residents; however no recent (or reliable) population statistics are available. A 1986 survey by the National Slum Dwellers Federation (NSDF) counted 530,225 people (106,045 households) living in 80,518 structures. These numbers have almost certainly increased as Mumbai currently takes in an estimated 230 newcomers a day. Dharavi, as one of the biggest economic centers, is likely to have absorbed a sizeable proportion of that incoming migration.

It is difficult to grasp the density of Dharavi. While the total area is an estimated 550 acres, just short of one square mile, a recent survey by the Kamla Raheja Vidyanidhi Institute of Architecture (KRVA) established that one central area of Dharavi, the Chamra Bazaar, contained densities of up to 18,000 people per acre. Assuming a population of approximately 700,000, the population density in Dharavi is 11 times as dense as Mumbai as a whole and more than 6 times as dense as daytime Manhattan without all the niceties of consistently running water, electricity, sewage solutions, roads, or healthcare. There is one municipal hospital and



one toilet for every several hundred people, causing rampant disease and a paltry standard of living for residents.

One Man's Trash...

Dharavi literally overlooks the Bandra-Kurla Complex which is the new financial and commercial center in Mumbai. In a city bound by water and already fighting to accommodate millions of inhabitants, the centrally located Dharavi represents substantial economic value and there is much pressure from developers and builders to free the land for commercial development that has been decades in the making.

Back in 1971, the Indian government enacted the Maharashtra Slum Areas (Improvement, Clearance, and Redevelopment) Act which drew an operational framework



for preparing and submitting proposals for the modification of the development plan of Greater Mumbai and also created the Slum Rehabilitation Authority (SRA). According to the act the SRA was "... declared as a planning authority, to function as a local authority for the area under its jurisdiction. [The] SRA has been empowered to prepare and submit proposals for modification to the Development Plan of Greater Mumbai" according to their website.

In 2004, the Maharashtra state government accepted a \$3-billion proposal submitted by Mr. Mukesh Mehta for the redevelopment of Dharavi. In a 2008 LA Times article he described the area by saying, "You're talking of a location that's fantastic. This is the only location in Mumbai where I can bulldoze 500 acres of land and redesign." Despite the fact that his redevelopment plan was adopted, it has been subject to perpetual debate and delay due to differences of opinion from residents. Some slum residents believe the redevelopment will provide a chance for them to live in dignity in proper apartments while others feel it is just another in a long line of disingenuous to oust them from their homes and lifestyle.

Mehta further stated that his goal is to "create a brand-new beautiful suburb complete with green space, schools, hospitals and reliable public services such as sanitation," things which Dharavi residents sorely need. Many locals feel the plan is ambitious for a place like Dharavi where failed examples of redevelopment can be readily found in the form of buildings abandoned halfway through construction and others in disrepair because of mismanagement and corruption.

The SRA Plan

According to the SRA website, several phases of redevelopment will transpire. Among other minor details, "the slum dweller whose name appears in the voter's list as of January 1, 2000 and



who is the actual occupant of the hutment is eligible for rehabilitation. Each family will be allotted a self contained house of 225 ft² carpeted area free of cost. The eligible slum dwellers appearing in Annexure II certified by the Competent Authority will be included in the rehabilitation scheme. Eligible slum dwellers will be given rehabilitation tenements in Dharavi.

"During the implementation of this project, Dharavi residents will be provided with transit tenements, in

close proximity of Dharavi or in Dharavi itself. The developer will bear the cost on account of rent of the transit tenements, but the cost of expenditure of consumables like water, electricity, telephone etc. will have to be borne by the slum dwellers."

The plan also includes improvements to infrastructure such as wider roads, electricity, ample water supply, playgrounds, schools, colleges, medical centers, socio-cultural centers, etc. For proper implementation, Dharavi has been divided into 10 sectors and sectors will be developed by different developers. The total duration of this project is expected to be between 5 to 7 years.

And the Existing Local Economy?

Fortunately the planning authorities are taking the local economy into consideration when planning for the future employment of the slum dwellers. One estimate places the annual value of goods produced in Dharavi at \$500 million. Commercial and home manufacturing businesses

offer employment for a large share of its population as well as for some workers living outside the slum. For the various industrial units in Dharavi, it is being proposed that non-polluting industrial businesses be retained. Current slum cottage industries include large-scale recycling,



leather tanneries, metal work, woodwork, machinery manufacturing, printing, garment finishing factories, and other small scale factories producing a wide array of manufactured goods mostly for local consumption but for export as well. There is also local manufacturing of shoes, luggage, and jewelry. Almost any economic activity that can be accommodated within the confines of small, corrugated aluminum huts exists in Dharavi.

In addition, the SRA states that

“All the currently established businesses and manufacturing units will be incorporated into the plan and will be provided with modern technical and economical strategies for sustainable development.” How exactly these cottage industries will be maintained in a new, ostensibly less polluted housing arrangement has yet to be delineated, but at least the SRA and developers have not completely ignored the long-term economic plight of the lower caste in Dharavi by making some allowances for current revenue streams.

From Here on Out

It is certainly uncommon in the world of real estate to contrast slum land with an estimated value of \$10 billion to the poverty of its residents, many of whom live on close to \$1 per day. In total, the proposed development projects throughout the Dharavi slum, hopefully to be undertaken by local developers and government housing entities in short fashion, amount to \$3.4 billion. While no one would envy the lives of the slum’s residents kept afloat on an economy of \$500 million inside Dharavi’s makeshift city limits, relocation outside of the slum might not improve the residents’ economic situations. Most 21st century land use notions are poorly equipped to create communities that, on a massive scale, both house the poor and accommodate their self-sufficient economies. Redevelopment certainly has its deficiencies; in this instance, though, it may also have its casualties.

For more articles and some videos and on the redevelopment of Dharavi, explore the following links:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qtkvsNUVF5Y&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILycPHwieYk&feature=related>

<http://www.sra.gov.in/>

http://www.mmrdamumbai.org/compreh_transport_study.htm

www.transformmumbai.com

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-dharavi8-2008sep08,0,1830588.story>

<http://www.sra.gov.in/HTMLPages/Dharavi.htm>

<http://www.ndtv.com/convergence/ndtv/story.aspx?id=NEWEN20070019991>