"Social Impact of Redevelopment and Gentrification on Long-Term Residents in Delhi's Resettlement Colonies"

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Abstract:

This study explores the social impact of redevelopment and gentrification on long-term residents in Delhi's resettlement colonies. Rapid urban development has changed housing conditions and community structures in these areas. The research uses surveys and interviews to understand residents' experiences. The findings show that while redevelopment can improve infrastructure, it may also lead to rising living costs, displacement pressure, and weakening community ties. The study suggests that inclusive urban planning is important to protect long-term residents and ensure balanced development.

Objectives: This study aims to understand how redevelopment and gentrification projects affect the lives of long-term residents in Delhi's resettlement colonies. It explores how residents perceive these changes, the stress and challenges they experience due to displacement, and how such transformations influence their sense of belonging, neighbourhood identity, and continuity of their cultural and social life.

Keywords: Redevelopment, Gentrification, Resettlement Colonies, Social Impact, Delhi.

I. Introduction:

1.1 The Human Cost of a "World-Class" City:

In recent decades, Delhi has undergone rapid transformation as it aims to become a "world-class" city. Large infrastructure projects, metro networks, commercial hubs, and planned residential developments have reshaped the city's landscape. These changes are often presented as signs of modernization and economic progress. However, behind this vision of development lies a different reality experienced by many communities living on the margins of the city.

For residents of resettlement colonies such as Narela and Bawana, redevelopment is not always seen as an opportunity for improvement. Instead, it often brings uncertainty and fear about their future in the city. Many long-term residents worry that the same development processes that promise progress may once again threaten the homes and communities they have spent years

building.

1.2 A Cycle of Displacement:

Many families living in these colonies were originally relocated there as part of earlier slum clearance and beautification drives (Bhan, 2016). At that time, areas like Narela and Bawana were located on the outskirts of Delhi and lacked basic infrastructure. Over the years, residents gradually built homes, small businesses, and social networks that helped transform these spaces into functioning communities.

However, as Delhi has expanded, these once peripheral areas have become valuable urban land. Planning initiatives such as the Zonal Development Plan for Zone P-I (2010) now imagine Narela as an important industrial and commercial hub. As a result, the same communities that were once pushed to the margins may again face displacement. Scholars describe this recurring experience as a condition of "permanent temporariness," where residents continue to live with uncertainty about their long-term security in the city (Dupont, 2008).

1.3 Community and Urban Change:

For many residents, a neighbourhood is more than a physical space; it is a network of relationships that supports everyday life. Informal support systems— such as neighbours helping each other, local shopkeepers offering credit, or shared childcare—play an important role in these communities. Redevelopment projects that replace existing neighbourhoods with high-rise housing or commercial spaces can disrupt these social networks. Although such projects may improve infrastructure, they may also weaken the sense of belonging and support that residents depend on. As Fullilove (2004) describes, this disruption can create "root shock," a form of emotional and social distress caused by the loss of familiar community ties.

II. Review of literature:

Scholarly discussions on Delhi's resettlement colonies have increasingly moved beyond the technical language of "slum clearance" to examine the broader social consequences of displacement and redevelopment. Researchers highlight how urban planning policies often treat the city primarily as an economic asset, while overlooking its importance as a lived social space for communities. This perspective is particularly relevant in areas such as Narela and Bawana, where redevelopment and planning initiatives have significantly shaped the lives of long-term residents.

Urban displacement is not only about the relocation of people from one place to another; it also involves the loss of social networks and community relationships. *Mindy Fullilove (2004)* describes this experience as "root shock," referring to the emotional and psychological distress caused when individuals are separated from their familiar social environment. In many low-income urban communities, survival depends heavily on informal networks of support. Studies by

Gautam Bhan (2016) show that neighbours, small shopkeepers, and local community members often provide essential support through shared resources, informal credit, and everyday cooperation. When redevelopment projects replace existing neighbourhoods with high-rise housing or commercial infrastructure, these networks are frequently disrupted. While physical conditions may improve, the weakening of social ties can create new challenges for residents.

Another key theme in the literature is the role of the state in shaping urban transformation. In contrast to the gradual market-driven gentrification seen in many Western cities, scholars argue that redevelopment in Delhi is often strongly influenced by state policies and planning decisions. *D. Asher Ghertner (2015)* explains that urban governance in Delhi is frequently guided by aesthetic ideas of what a "world-class" city should look like, which can lead to the marginalization of poorer communities. Similarly, *David Harvey (2003)* describes such processes as "accumulation by dispossession," where land occupied by lower-income groups is redeveloped in order to increase its economic value.

Research also highlights how resettlement policies have relocated many communities to the outskirts of the city. *Veronique Dupont (2008)* notes that although these policies were intended to integrate displaced populations into the formal city, they often resulted in new forms of social and spatial marginalization. *Ananya Roy (2009)* further explains this through the concept of urban informality, where planning decisions frequently change according to shifting economic priorities.

Although significant research has examined slum evictions and relocation in Delhi, there is still limited attention to what happens after resettlement. In particular, few studies explore how redevelopment and rising land values affect the everyday lives, identities, and sense of belonging of long-term residents. This study seeks to address that gap by focusing on the lived experiences of communities in Narela and Bawana and examining how urban redevelopment influences their social and cultural life.

Table 1: Comparison of Planning Logic vs. Lived Reality

Theoretical Concept	Zonal Plan (2010) Objective	Human/Social Impact in Resettlement
Spatial Justice	"Optimum land use" via Mega-Hubs.	Residents feel like "obstacles" to progress.
Aesthetic Rule	Modernizing "blighted" zones.	Erasure of local culture and street-level economies.
Social Capital	Standardized "housing units."	Breaking of neighbor-based safety nets and credit.
Economic Integration	Large-scale Industrial Parks.	Shift from local livelihoods to precarious wage

		labor.
The "Right to the City"	Private-Public Partnerships (PPP).	Erosion of the sense of belonging and ownership.

Source- Survey Conducted during Research

III. Methodology:

This study used a combination of different research methods to explore how redevelopment impacts long-term residents living in resettlement colonies in Delhi. The study was carried out in Narela and Bawana, two areas in North-West Delhi that have undergone significant urban expansion and redevelopment. These places were chosen because a lot of people who live there were moved before by government programs that resettled them, and they've gone through several changes in the city over time.
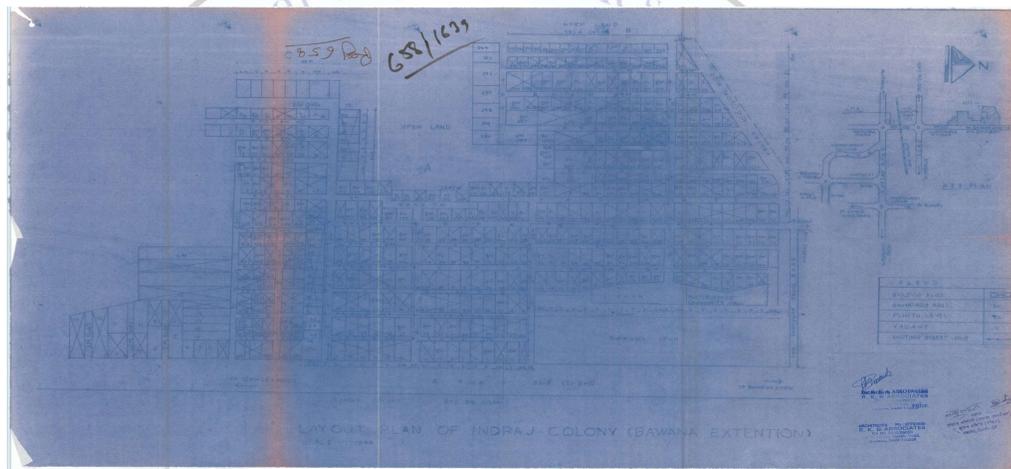

Figure1: Indraj Colony (Bawana Extn) Kanjhawala Road, Bawana, Delhi-39,

Link : https:// udd.delhi.gov.in/

Figure 2: Swatantra Nagar Ph-ll (Left out portion), Narela

Link: https://udd.delhi.gov.in/

A purposive sampling method was used to select participants with long-term knowledge of the area. The total number of people surveyed was 150, with 75 people from each colony.

Only residents who were 18 years or older and had lived in the area for at least ten years were included so that participants could reflect on the changes brought by redevelopment. Twenty residents were chosen for detailed interviews to learn more about their experiences.

Data was gathered through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale to measure how people felt about changes in space, economic security, relationships with others, and how connected they felt to their community. Interviews let people talk about their own stories of being displaced and how their neighborhoods changed.

The numbers were looked at using basic statistical methods, and the words were studied by finding common themes. Ethical guidelines were adhered to by securing informed consent, preserving confidentiality, and ensuring that participation was voluntary.

IV. Analysis of the data:

4.1 Housing Security and Living Conditions

Table 2: Perception of Housing Security (Mean Scores)

Indicator	Narela	Bawana
Feel secure in current house	4.1	3.9
Fear of eviction reduced	4.2	4.0
Satisfaction with housing structure	3.8	3.6
Adequacy of living space	2.9	2.7

The data indicates a strong sense of housing security in both areas, particularly regarding reduced fear of eviction. However, adequacy of living space received comparatively lower scores, suggesting that while tenure security has improved, spatial sufficiency remains a concern. Bawana shows slightly lower satisfaction levels than Narela, indicating relatively greater housing stress.

Table 3: Emerging Themes – Housing Security (Qualitative)

Theme	Description	Sample Narrative
Legal Recognition	Residents feel officially recognized	"Now the house is in our name."
Reduced Demolition Fear	Psychological relief	"We don't live in fear anymore."
Space Constraints	Small units for large families	''One room is not enough.''
Structural Issues	Seepage, ventilation problems	''Walls crack in monsoon.''

Interview findings reinforce quantitative results by highlighting psychological relief and legal recognition as major positive outcomes. However, concerns regarding overcrowding and construction quality are repeatedly mentioned, suggesting that physical adequacy has not fully matched security improvements.

4.2 Economic Impact and Livelihood:

Table 4: Economic Impact After Redevelopment (Mean Scores)

Indicator	Narela	Bawana
Income Improved	2.6	2.4
Employment opportunities improved	2.5	2.3
Increase in travel expenses	4.0	4.2

The low mean scores for income and employment improvement indicate that redevelopment has not significantly enhanced economic conditions. In contrast, high agreement regarding increased travel expenses reflects livelihood strain due to relocation. Bawana appears more economically affected than Narela.

Table 5 : Emerging Themes - Livelihood Impact (Qualitative)

Theme	Description	Sample Narrative
Job Loss	Loss of proximity-based work	"Employer was nearby earlier."
Increased Commuting	Long travel hours	"Two hours go in travel"
Loss of Customers	Vendors lost clientele	"People don't know us here!"
Financial Strain	Reduced savings	"Bus fare is expensive."

Qualitative responses clearly show livelihood disruption after relocation. Residents describe relocation as economically destabilizing due to distance from workplaces and increased transport costs. The narratives strongly support the quantitative finding of limited economic improvement.

4.3 Infrastructure and Basic Services:

Table 6: Satisfaction with Basic Services (Mean Scores)

Service	Narela	Bawana
Water supply	2.9	2.6
Electricity	3.4	3.2
Healthcare access	2.7	2.5

Public Transport	2.5	2.2
Sanitation	3.1	2.8

Electricity and sanitation show moderate satisfaction levels, suggesting partial infrastructural improvement. However, transport and healthcare services score low, particularly in Bawana. This indicates that physical relocation has not been accompanied by proportionate service planning.

Table 7: Emerging Themes - Infrastructure (Qualitative)

Theme	Description	Sample Narrative
Irregular Water Supply	Limited daily supply	"Water comes only for one hour.''
Poor Transport	Far from bus routes	"Metro is very far!"
Healthcare Distance	Limited access	"Hospitals are too far!"
Drainage Problems	Waterlogging	"Roads fill in monsoon."

Residents acknowledge improved formal housing but report deficiencies in daily services. Water, transportation, and healthcare access remain major concerns. These qualitative accounts align with the lower satisfaction scores observed in the survey.

4.4 Social Cohesion and Community Life

Table 8: Social Cohesion Indicators (Mean Scores)

Indicator	Narela	Bawana
Community bonding strong	3.6	3.3
Trust among neighbours	3.4	3.1
Sense of belonging	3.7	3.2

Social cohesion appears moderate in both areas, with slightly stronger community bonding in Narela. The findings suggest that while relocation disrupted earlier networks, new social relations are gradually forming.

Table 9: Emerging Themes- Social Relations (Qualitative)

Theme	Description	Sample Narrative
Network Disruption	Old neighbors seprated	"Our whole gali was scattered."
Gradual Adjustment	Rebuilding relationships	"We are adjusting slowly."
Reduced Conflict	Less congestion tension	"Less fighting now."
Weak Support	Limited mutal aid	"Earlier we helped more."

Relocation altered community structures. While overcrowding-related tensions have reduced, traditional support systems weakened. Residents are in a transitional phase of rebuilding social cohesion.

4.5 Before and After Redevelopment Comparison:

Table 10: Comparative Overview

Dimension	Before	After
Housing Security	Low	High
Eviction Risk	High	Low
Workplace Proximity	High	Low
Infrastructure	Informal	Formal but Limited
Social Networks	Strong	Moderately Disrupted

The comparison shows redevelopment as a structural improvement in housing security but a decline in economic proximity and social cohesion. The findings suggest a trade-off between tenure stability and livelihood convenience.

4.6 Area Comparison: Narela vs Bawana:

Table 11: Comparative Findings

Dimension	Narela	Bawana
Housing Satisfaction	Higher	Moderate
Economic Stress	High	Very high
Infrastructure Access	Moderate	Low
Social Cohesion	Stronger	Weaker

Across most dimensions, Bawana reflects comparatively greater vulnerability. Infrastructure gaps and livelihood challenges appear more severe in Bawana, while Narela demonstrates relatively better adjustment outcomes.

The integrated findings reveal that redevelopment significantly improved housing security and legal recognition. However, economic strain, infrastructure inadequacy, and social network disruption remain critical challenges. The outcomes vary slightly between Narela and Bawana, with Bawana exhibiting relatively greater stress across multiple indicators.

V.   Discussion:

The findings of this study highlight what can be described as a **"second wave of dispossession."** Unlike earlier displacement in Delhi, which involved direct eviction from central city slums, current forms of displacement are more gradual and market-driven. Rising land values

and redevelopment projects in areas such as Narela and Bawana create new pressures on long-term residents, making their   position in the city increasingly uncertain. This situation reflects *David Harvey's (2003)* idea of **"accumulation by dispossession,"** where urban land is redeveloped to increase its economic value, often at the cost of existing communities.

Another important outcome of redevelopment is the **erosion of social networks** that residents rely on for everyday survival. In low-income communities, neighbours, local shops, and shared spaces provide essential support systems. When redevelopment replaces open neighbourhood spaces with gated complexes or industrial infrastructure, these networks weaken. *Mindy Fullilove (2004)* describes this disruption as **"root shock,"** referring to the social and emotional stress caused by losing familiar community environments.

The study also reveals a **mismatch between redevelopment goals and local livelihoods**. Many residents work in informal sectors that are not supported by large industrial or commercial projects planned in these areas. As a result, redevelopment may increase economic inequality rather than improve opportunities for local communities.

Overall, the findings suggest that urban planning must consider **social realities and community needs** alongside economic development in order to create more inclusive and sustainable cities.

VI.   Conclusion:

This study examined the social and spatial changes experienced by long-term residents in the resettlement colonies of Narela and Bawana under the *Zonal Development Plan (ZDP) 2010.* The findings show that redevelopment has created a form of **"invisible displacement,"** where residents are not always physically evicted but still experience economic pressure, social disruption, and uncertainty about their future. Survey results revealed that many households face **economic insecurity and rising living costs,** while qualitative interviews highlighted the emotional stress caused by the weakening of community networks. The loss of shared spaces such as neighbourhood markets and informal gathering areas has reduced everyday social support, creating what scholars describe as **"root shock"** *(Fullilove, 2004).*

The study also shows that redevelopment plans often focus on economic growth and infrastructure, while giving limited attention to the needs and livelihoods of existing residents. Many participants work in informal sectors that are not supported by the new industrial and commercial developments planned in these areas. As a result, redevelopment can increase inequality and create a gap between planning goals and local realities.

Overall, the research suggests that **urban planning must become more people-centred**, recognizing the importance of community networks, local livelihoods, and residents' right to remain part of the city's future.

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