Vehras of Ludhiana
## Rental Housing for Migrant Workers

Banashree Banerjee

Policy Lab 4: Redefining 'Private' to include Rental Housing Providers for the Poor: International and National Lessons
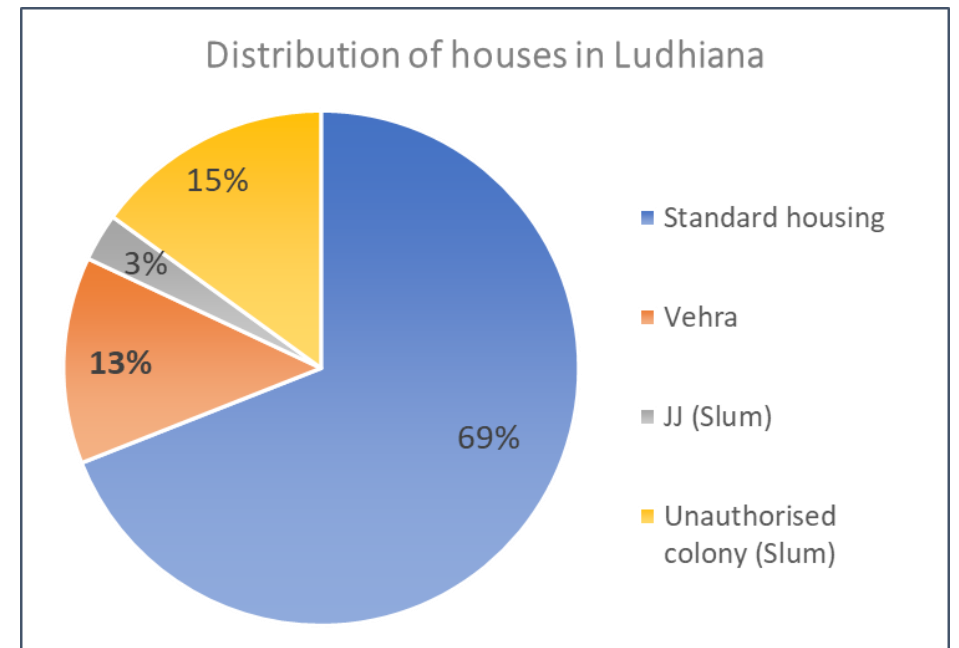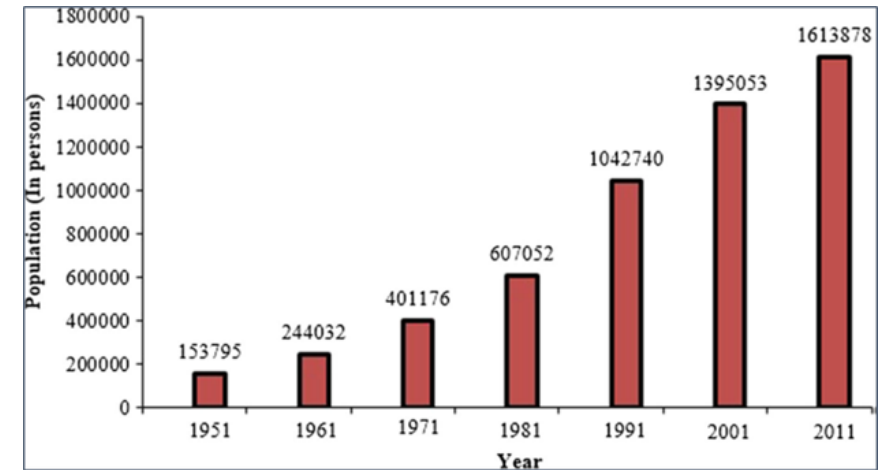
16 December 2020

This presentation

- This presentation is about a particular form of informal rental housing, locally known as "vehra", which provides cheap accommodation for more than 200,000 migrant workers in Ludhiana.

- The presentation explores how this particular sub-market works in the context of the city's economy, its governance and land and housing settings; and in the context of livelihood strategies of migrant workers.

- In doing so, it raised wider issues of supporting rental housing for the poor through policy and local practice.
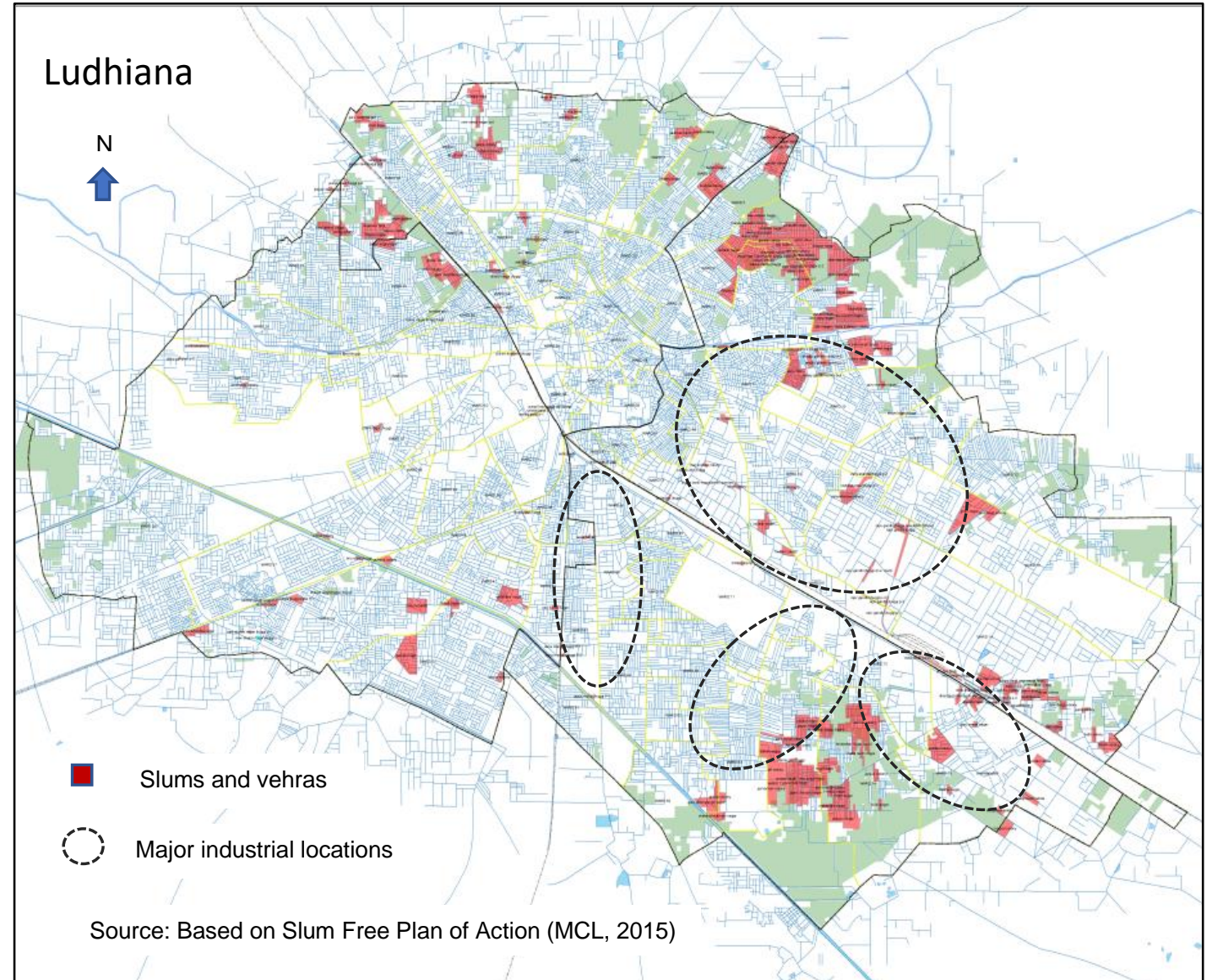

Punjab
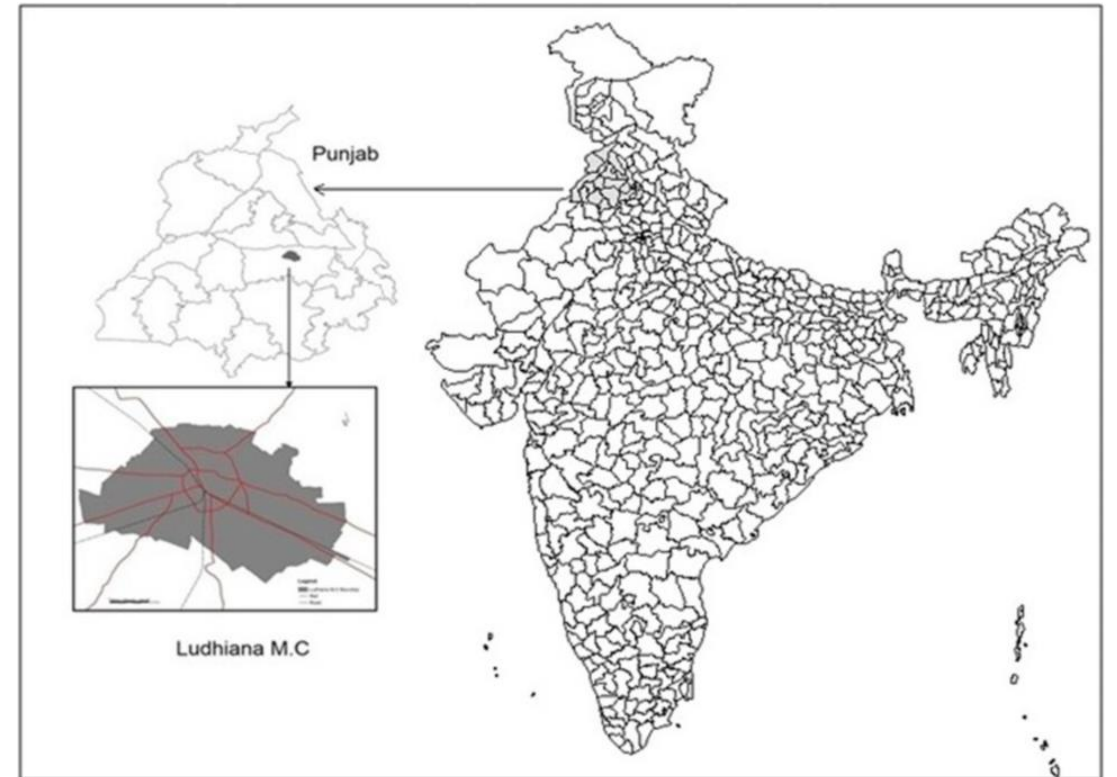
Ludhiana M.C

Context: Ludhiana, migrants and housing

- Rapid population growth

- Economy: Industries- large, medium, (formal, informal), related services, construction sector.

- 350,000 migrant workers, 95% from UP & Bihar, mostly employed as industrial and construction labour, own account informal workers (NSSO, 2010)

- Very little formal housing for low income groups (5000 units BSUP)

- 52% of city area consists of unplanned growth

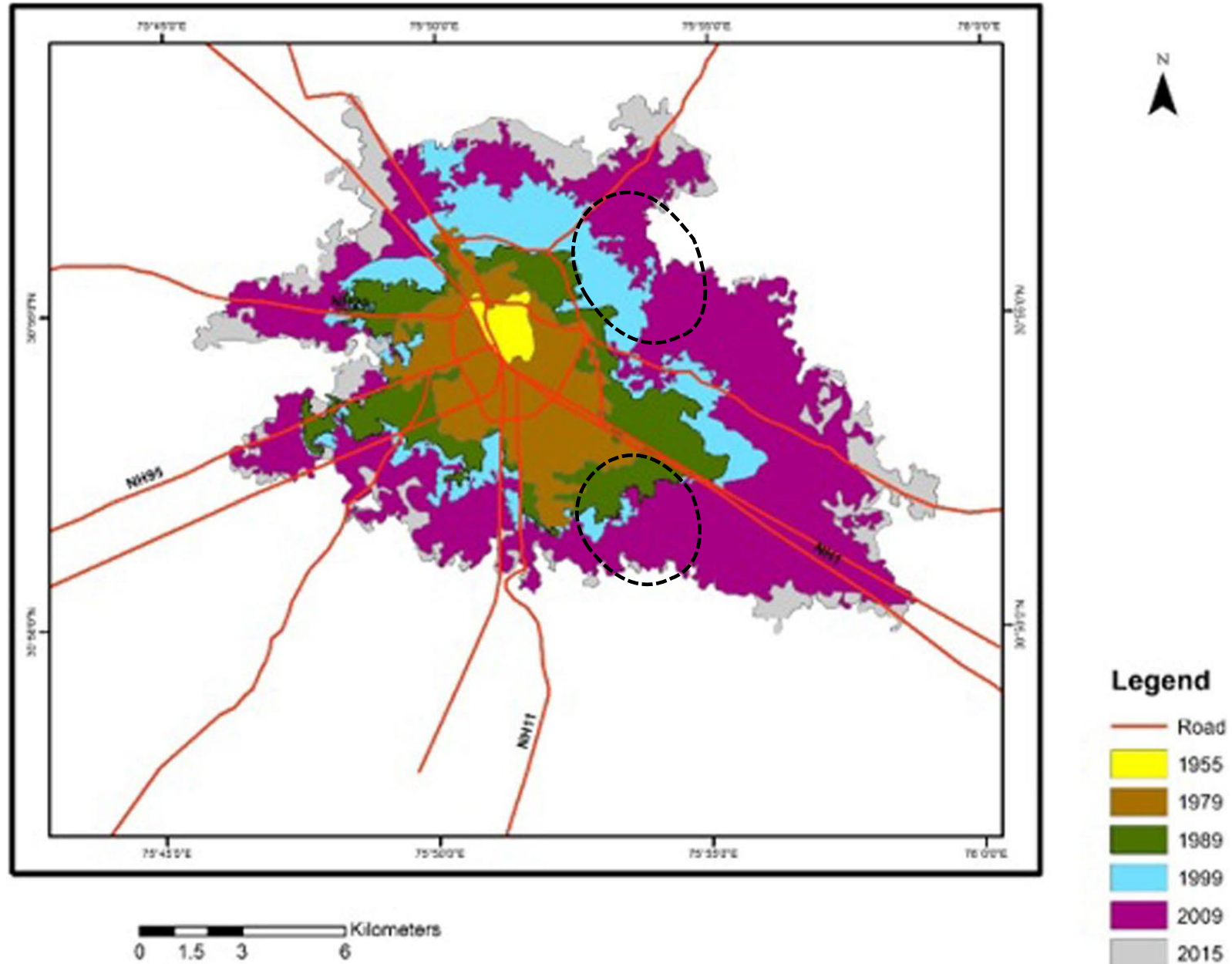- Informal rental housing in vehras, occupied by migrants makes up 13% of housing supply.

Distribution of houses in Ludhiana

- Standard housing
- Vehra
- JJ (Slum)
- Unauthorised colony (Slum)

69%
13%
3%
15%

Vehras and the City

No of vehras	About 850
Population	200,000 to 225,000 renters
Location	All over city but mostly around industrial belt in the informally developed area (village extensions, unauthorised colonies, concerted agriculture land)

Ludhiana

N

■ Slums and vehras

⬭ Major industrial locations

Source: Based on Slum Free Plan of Action (MCL, 2015)

Ludhiana: Built-up areas 1955 - 2015

Legend

— Road
- 1955
- 1979
- 1989
- 1999
- 2009
- 2015

Vehras: Housing and services

Layout	Rows of rooms built on the long sides of plots with a narrow courtyard in between
No. of rooms	10 to >100
No. of floors	1 to 2 for smaller vehras and up to 4 for larger ones
Room size	10 to 15 sq meters
Room occupancy & rent	4-6 male workers in shifts or family Rs 1500 to 2500 per month
Services	Shared tap, latrines, bathing enclosures in courtyard or end of corridor; cooking in open or in room
Persons per latrine	12-35

Issues

- **Overcrowding, poor ventilation**
- **Insufficient services, drinking water contamination, sewage overflow**

Owners and renters

The renters

- Migrants from Bihar and Eastern UP
- Industrial labour, informal services
- Income: Rs 8,000 to 20,000, average: 11,000
- Rent: 1500-2500/ room
- Complain of poor services but don't want to raise rent
- Many go to village/ rural Punjab during harvest season
- Like to return to same neighborhood: close to work and "purvanchali" lifestyle.
- Welfare association, trade union, municipal councilor but no say in housing conditions
- 96% want to return to village


Cordial owner-tenant relations
- Rent default of 2-3 months OK
- Eviction only for "gunda gardi" (anti-social behaviour)
- Owners help with police, identity etc.
- Lock down period: rent amnesty, fare to go home

The owners
- Land owners
- Some own several vehras
- Manage small vehras themselves
- Employ managers for large/many vehras
- Several are "big persons"
- Some own shops in area
- Consider "bhaiyyas" as trouble free tenants
- Have good relations with police

Sherpur (near Focal Point)
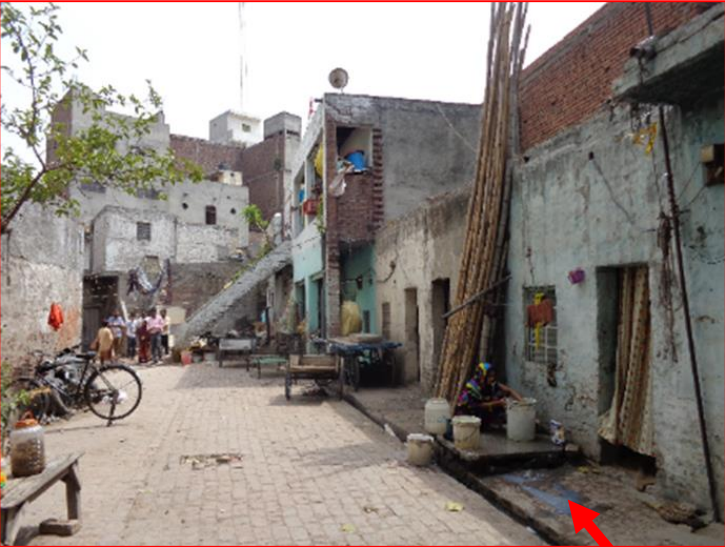
Vehras are part of a socio-cultural and economic sub-system of migrant workers

Role of Municipal Corporation

Information	• No complete information on vehras. Sanitary inspectors have the knowledge. • Survey conducted in 2013 by collector but no records
Health	• MCL records show vehras have the highest occurrence of water borne and respiratory diseases • Outbreaks of gastroenteritis from contaminated water • Disconnects water supply, restored on payment of fine • COVID 19 testing and surveillance, some cases
Services	• Municipal water supply and sewerage connections available (but not adequate for population). • Waterlogging because of low-lying location in city
Building permission	• All constructed without approval • Some regularised retrospectively by paying "composition fee" • No standards available for "labour quarters"
Tax	• Many owners pay self assessment property tax • Proposal to tax @ 7.5% rateable value, survey being conducted

Media reporting

Home / Cities / Ludhiana / MC disconnects 85 illegal connections in vehras

MC disconnects 85 illegal connections in vehras

Municipal Corporation has disconnected a total of 85 illegal connections in various parts of the city which were taken by the plot owners in the common vehras made for migrant families.

82 more diarrhoea, gastro cases force MC to spring into action

A day after diarrhoea claimed three lives at Parkash Nagar, Jawaddi, as many as 82 new cases of diarrhoea and gastroenteritis were reported from the area on Thursday.

PUNJAB Updated: Jul 24, 2014, 19:17 IST

Harshraj Singh
Hindustan Times

MC slow in dealing with health threat from vehras
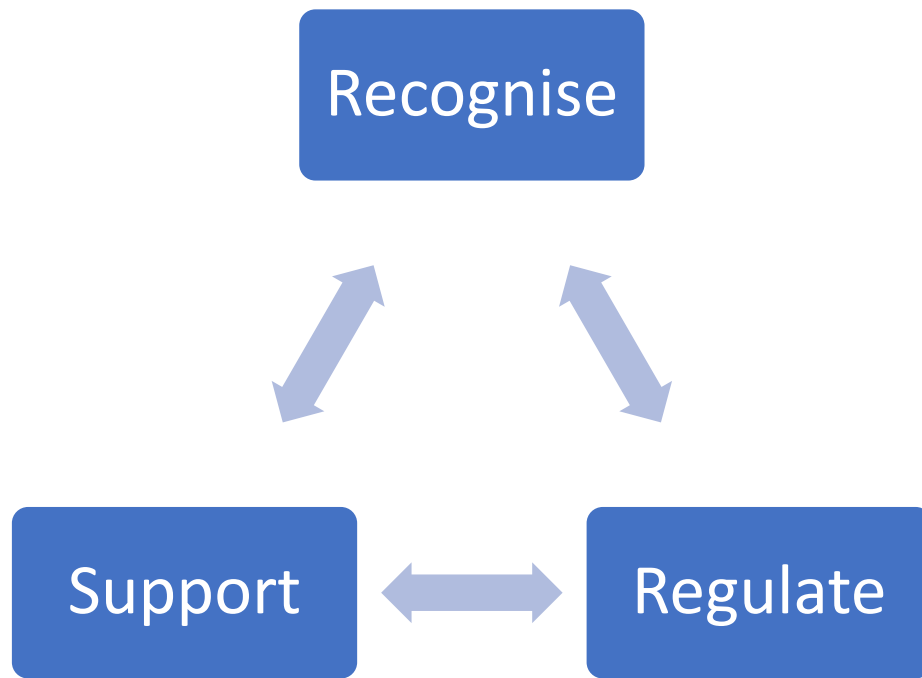
Nidhi Singhi | TNN | Aug 30, 2010, 20:25 IST

Reflections on policy and practice

A 3-pronged strategy

Recognise
- Accept the reality of large scale supply and continuing demand
- Recognise as a valid housing sub-system in policy

Support
- Consider support to owners with loans
- Negotiate/ provide access to adequate services as part of universal access policy of SBM
- Improve area-wide drainage

Regulate
- Define building byelaws and service standards appropriate for city/ state.
- Encourage owners to get building permission and ensure compliance

Learning from the case study

- Down-market rental housing is a prolific, though "hidden" market.
- Precise quantification is not possible, but it is possible to understand trends and practices
- The dynamics of supply and demand are specific to each city, influenced by its economy, growth rate and housing market, leading to diverse and distinct typologies which are specific to context.
- It is of vital importance to understand these contexts and differences in order to articulate responsive policies and practices towards rental housing for the urban poor.