

# It's still a swell of woes for city slum-dwellers

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CHENNAI: Her father's body lay in her home in Saidapet for two days until Maragatham managed to wade through the floodwaters to find a graveyard during the December 2015 floods. The 34-year-old housewife says the local councillor did not come to her help and it was only after a friend loaned her money that she could cremate the body. At Choolaimedu, a woman had to deliver of a baby on the terrace as it was impossible to reach the hospital. Elsewhere, a boy drowned in floodwaters trying to rescue a dog.

With the monsoon just days away, slum-dwellers in the city fear their homes may be washed away. If they lose their homes, they will have to stay put at Perumbakkam, an eventuality they are just not prepared for.

People in 41 slums in Chintadripet, Saidapet, Teynampet, Chetpet, Egmore, Choolaimedu, Kodambakkam and Arumbakkam got together at Loyola College on Monday to voice their fears.

Residents hoped that walls would be built alongside canals so that floodwater does not get into their homes. Chetpet resident Janani said, "There is little help from the government. When floods came last year, the state machinery was paralysed. It was NGOs and good Samaritans who reached out to us." At least one lakh slum-dwellers from the city have already been resettled in 25,000 slum board houses in Okkiyam-Thoraipakkam, Semmenchery and Perumbakkam. Another 30,000 houses are getting ready for occupation by slum-dwellers.

Social activist Vanessa Peter said, "Slum-dwellers do not have to be moved out. It is possible to reconstruct multi-storey buildings to house them." Peter finds that the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board Act, 1971 does not even have components on land, housing or tenure rights. There is no rehabilitation and resettlement policy in the state that looks at housing for slum-dwellers. As protocols are missing, resettlement takes place in a haphazard manner.

After the reconstruction happens and permanent housing is provided, the state has no policy or guidelines to elaborate on specific needs of the rehabilitated residents. "In several cases, the fund assistance of 2,500 per month (for a year) promised to resettled residents is not given. For many who were resettled eight months ago, assistance was given for only four months."