

SOCIAL EQUITY AND INCLUSION IN URBAN PLANNING: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS IN JHARKHAND

Aakash Jain, Ashish Kumar Singh

Student, Mentor

Masters in Urban Planning

Sunder Deep Group of Institutions, Gaziabad & AKTU, Lucknow, UP, India

Abstract

Jharkhand, a resource-rich but developmentally challenged state in eastern India, presents a unique landscape for understanding social equity and inclusion in urban planning. This paper explores how urban planning in Jharkhand addresses (or fails to address) the needs of marginalized populations, including tribal communities, informal settlers, women, and the disabled. Using case studies from cities like Ranchi, Dhanbad, and Jamshedpur, the paper analyzes current planning practices, governance challenges, and policy limitations. It also suggests pathways to ensure inclusive and equitable urban development tailored to Jharkhand's socio-cultural and geographic context.

Introduction

Urbanization in Jharkhand is still evolving, with cities like Ranchi, Dhanbad, Bokaro, and Jamshedpur emerging as economic hubs. However, the benefits of urban growth are unevenly distributed. A large proportion of the urban population lives in informal settlements, and indigenous Adivasi populations face cultural and spatial marginalization. Planning processes are often top-down and exclude the voices of those most affected by urban transformation. In this context, social equity and inclusion become essential for balanced urban development.

Conceptual Framework

In the context of Jharkhand, social equity implies overcoming historic injustices faced by Adivasis and other marginalized communities in land acquisition, housing, and access to basic services. Inclusion means creating mechanisms for these groups to participate in urban decision-making.

Key Dimensions:

- Tribal equity: Recognizing customary rights, cultural spaces, and land tenure systems.
- Spatial equity: Addressing slum development and access to infrastructure.
- Gender equity: Urban safety, mobility, and sanitation for women.
- Institutional equity: Representation in urban governance structures like Municipal Corporations and ULB.
-

Challenges in Jharkhand's Urban Landscape

1.1 Tribal Displacement and Loss of Land

Urban expansion often encroaches on tribal lands. Ranchi's rapid growth has led to the displacement of Adivasi communities who traditionally owned common lands without formal title, creating tension and mistrust toward urban projects.

1.2 Informal Settlements and Housing

A significant share of the urban population in Ranchi and Dhanbad lives in informal settlements with limited access to water, sanitation, and formal housing. Policies often focus on demolition rather than upgrading or regularizing these areas.

1.3 Gender and Safety

Jharkhand's urban women face safety concerns in public spaces and poor transport connectivity, especially in peripheral areas. Lack of well-lit streets and public toilets limits their mobility and participation in the workforce.

1.4 Urban-Rural Continuum

Many urban areas in Jharkhand have grown around former villages, leading to a blurred boundary between rural and urban. This creates a mismatch in service delivery and governance models.

Policy and Institutional Framework in Jharkhand

1.5 Urban Local Bodies (ULBs)

Jharkhand's ULBs often lack technical capacity and financial autonomy. Participation of tribal groups and women in municipal governance remains minimal, despite the 74th Constitutional Amendment.

1.6 State Urban Development Mission

While aligned with national missions like Smart Cities and AMRUT, the Jharkhand Urban Development Mission has struggled with implementation gaps and limited community participation.

1.7 Legal Mechanisms

- The Chhotanagpur and Santhal Parganas Tenancy Acts protect tribal land rights but are poorly integrated with modern urban planning.
- The Jharkhand Municipal Act mandates ward committees but lacks clarity on inclusive representation.

Case Studies

1.1 Slum Upgradation in Ranchi

The Jharkhand State Urban Development Agency (JSUDA) initiated in-situ redevelopment in select Ranchi slums with mixed success. While infrastructure improved, tenure security and community participation remained weak.

1.8 Smart City Projects in Ranchi and Dhanbad

Though Smart City initiatives brought infrastructure investments, they often prioritized central business districts over marginal communities. Few provisions were made for affordable housing or inclusive public spaces.

1.9 Urban Employment for Tribal Youth in Jamshedpur

Jamshedpur's unique private governance under Tata Steel has led to more organized urban development. Programs for tribal skill development and employment show potential for inclusive planning, though scalability remains a concern.

Recommendations for Inclusive Urban Planning in Jharkhand

- Integrate Customary Land Rights: Planning frameworks must respect and formalize tribal tenure systems where possible.
- Slum Upgradation Over Eviction: Invest in in-situ infrastructure and tenure recognition rather than displacement.
- Gender-Inclusive Urban Design: Create safe public spaces, well-lit transport corridors, and gender-segregated sanitation facilities.
- Participatory Planning Processes: Institutionalize ward-level planning forums with representation from women, Adivasi groups, and informal workers.
- Capacity Building: Train ULB staff in inclusive planning, and partner with local universities and civil society organizations.
- Local Data Systems: Create ward-level data maps with indicators for inclusion, such as disability access, women's safety audits, and tribal land patterns.

Conclusion

In Jharkhand, urban planning must align with the state's unique socio-cultural and geographic realities. Inclusive and equitable planning is not just a technical requirement but a moral and constitutional mandate. By centering the voices of marginalized communities, recognizing customary systems, and reforming institutional mechanisms, Jharkhand's cities can become more just, resilient, and sustainable.

References

- Government of Jharkhand, Urban Development & Housing Department
- JSUDA project reports
- Census of India, Urban Profile: Jharkhand
- Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS)
- UN-Habitat reports on Urban Equity
- Economic and Political Weekly articles on tribal land and urban governance

Copyright & License:



© Authors retain the copyright of this article. This work is published under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0), permitting unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.