



PRESS RELEASE

New Delhi, 25 February 2021

Despite Experiencing Acute Distress During the Pandemic, Delhi's Gadia Lohar Community Continues to Face Exclusion

Urgent Need for Secure Housing, Livelihood Security, and Access to Services

Delhi's **Gadia Lohar** community has suffered greatly during the coronavirus pandemic, including through loss of livelihoods and income and the continued exclusion from state schemes. A rapid assessment survey conducted by [Housing and Land Rights Network](#) (HLRN) in 40 Gadia Lohar settlements across Delhi has documented the community's concerns, persistent neglect and marginalization, and increased impoverishment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Background

The Gadia Lohar community, a historically nomadic community from Rajasthan, has been living in over 90 'informal settlements' (*bastis*) in the National Capital Region of Delhi for several decades. Since 2017, HLRN has been actively engaged with the community. Given the acute lack of data and information on Gadia Lohars in Delhi, HLRN carried out a primary research study in their settlements and published a report, in September 2019, titled [Mapping the Marginalized: Delhi's Gadia Lohar Community](#). The report revealed the community's grossly inadequate living conditions, including lack of housing and access to basic services. In addition, residents of several Gadia Lohar settlements have faced multiple incidents of forced eviction over the years, resulting in violations of their human rights and increased insecurity.

In order to assess the specific impact of the pandemic on the community, HLRN conducted a rapid assessment survey between December 2020 and February 2021, in which telephonic interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with residents of 40 Gadia Lohar settlements across Delhi.

Main Findings of the HLRN Assessment Study

- 1. Incomplete Survey of Settlements:** Despite being settled in Delhi for decades, most of the Gadia Lohar settlements in Delhi are not recognized by the Delhi government and its Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB). In only 18 Gadia Lohar settlements (of the 40 settlements surveyed by HLRN), preliminary surveys had been initiated by DUSIB.
- 2. Exclusion from State Housing:** All community members that HLRN spoke with are not aware of the Delhi government's Mukhya Mantri Awas Yojana (Chief Minister's Housing Scheme – MMAY), which aims to provide *in situ* (on site) permanent housing to eligible residents of 'informal settlements.' Lack of awareness about the scheme and its implementation criteria has instilled a fear of exclusion in the community, which has historically been denied access to state social welfare policies and entitlements.
- 3. Fear of Eviction:** All survey respondents stated that they live with the constant fear of eviction and imminent threat of demolition of their homes, across all Gadia Lohar settlements. Though there has not been any incident of forced eviction in their settlements since 2018, in 2019, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi attempted to demolish homes in Ashok Vihar, Wazirpur, without prior notice. Timely intervention of the judiciary, through a stay order on demolition, saved the settlement from being destroyed.

4. **Adverse Impact on Livelihood and Access to Food:** The sudden national COVID-19 lockdown in 2020 adversely affected the community's traditional livelihood, which consists of the manufacture and sale of iron tools, utensils, and implements. During the extended lockdown, there were very few customers for their wares. This resulted in considerable income loss and impacted their ability to purchase adequate food. Since over 45 per cent of the residents of Gadia Lohar settlements in Delhi do not have ration cards, they faced challenges during the lockdown in accessing food distributed by the government through the Public Distribution System (PDS).
5. **Access to Healthcare:** Community members that HLRN spoke with reported that mobile health vans visit the Gadia Lohar settlements, once a week. However, during the lockdown, this service was disrupted, thereby impeding their access to healthcare.
6. **Disruption in Children's Education:** With the pandemic-induced closure of schools and shift to online classes, the education of Gadia Lohar children has been severely affected. Over 40 per cent of people surveyed stated that they do not have smartphones through which their children can access online education. Even those with smartphones, reported often not having enough money to recharge phones or to pay for data/internet access. Since March 2020, children from the community have been depending only on homework given by schools for their learning.

Recommendations

Housing and Land Rights Network would like to propose the following recommendations—to the central and Delhi government—to address the concerns of the Gadia Lohar community and to help members recover from the acute impacts of the pandemic:

1. **Recognize and include all Gadia Lohar settlements in the Delhi government's survey for MMAY** and in DUSIB's official list of 'slums'/JJ (*Jhuggi-Jhopdi*) Clusters.
2. **Provide adequate housing with security of tenure**, on a priority basis to the community:
 - Permanent housing should be designed in a way that enables people to have a shop below and their home above (*'neeche dukaan, upar makaan'*).
 - All housing provided by the government should be within three to four kilometres of where people live, in order to protect their livelihoods.
 - Given their acute economic deprivation, housing should be provided free or at a very nominal cost, based on their ability to pay, without increasing their impoverishment and indebtedness.
3. **Facilitate the provision of adequate documentation** and identity cards for the community in order to ensure their equal access to state entitlements and welfare schemes, including PDS (through ration cards) and pension schemes.
4. **Ensure access to essential services**, including clean and potable water, electricity, and sanitation in all Gadia Lohar settlements, irrespective of their nature and status of tenure.
5. As per the request of the community, provide them with 'caste certificates' and **accord them the 'Most Backward Class'** status, on account of their historical marginalization.
6. **Create a Gadia Lohar Welfare Board** to assess and remedy the historical injustices faced by the community, develop special welfare schemes for them, and ensure adequate allocation of funds.
7. **Ensure the continuation of education** of Gadia Lohar children during the pandemic through the provision of 'smart' devices and free data/internet access.
8. Provide livelihood support and **employment guarantee** for the community members.

Delhi's Gadia Lohar community has faced historic neglect and state apathy, and continues to live in deprivation, without secure housing. Housing and Land Rights Network hopes that both the central and Delhi governments will prioritize the needs of the community, including in the COVID-19 recovery process, and ensure the guarantee of their human rights, including their human right to an adequate standard of living.

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