

## Campaign against Demolition of Bastis of Construction Workers



The construction workers in Ahmedabad and Surat are mostly from the tribal belt that runs along the Eastern hilly parts of Gujarat. Some seasonal migrants live in rented accommodation, especially when they are single males. However a large majority migrates with the family and lives on the road side in temporary habitations. These settlements have come up at road sides, by railway tracks, under flyover bridges, at private plots rented out by the plot owners, vacant agriculture plots, and plots with disputed ownership. The size of these settlements varies. The largest of these settlements in Ahmedabad is at Juhapura Sewage farm where there is a core settlement of 500 households. The smallest may comprise of ten households. While the spatial structure of the settlement is not permanent, the communities resident in these settlements are permanent habitants of the city. The families may have been resident in the city for a generation or more. Some were born and grew up here. The families continue to maintain a link with their village of origin. The families live for up to ten months in the city, going back only during major holidays or peak agriculture season. While municipal authorities

The ground beneath these settlements always remains shaky. Even decades old settlements are liable to be uprooted at any point of time. Road widening drive, settlement of a dispute, finalization of building plan on vacant plots – all these can cause displacement. Railway cleans up its tracks every year uprooting settlements by the track side that trickle back once the drive is over. During one year 2011-12, six of the 20 settlements monitored were wiped out. Centre for Labor Research and Action has mapped 50 such settlements across the city comprising a total of 2500 households and 10,000 workers. However the mapping is not complete. There are likely to be more such settlements buried in the nooks and corners of the city.

These bastis are not enumerated as slums by municipal authorities on the ground that the residents are not permanent. The Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation is undertaking a massive zero slum project Rajiv Awas Yojna (RAY) supported by a Central funds whereby it is proposed to make Ahmedabad a slum free city. There is urgent need to bring these settlements within the

ambit of RAY. These settlements need to be mapped and planned for in the rehabilitation package.

There has been a spate of evictions recently. CLRA is engaged in a campaign to prevent evictions and ensure security of tenure for the residents of these settlements. The campaign comprises of organizing the residents into a city wide collective and undertaking advocacy including court suits to stall evictions. Some ongoing struggles are described below

Arjun Nagar Basti: This is a settlement of 150 residents that is settled on railway track in Ranip area. The settlement has been served eviction notice by Railway department. CLRA has written to the Railway authorities to stall evictions. It also led a delegation to the District Collector office.

Sewage basti: Comprising of 500 households, part of the basti is being evicted by the Metro rail project and part by Irrigation Department. Centre is undertaking advocacy with both these departments to stall evictions.

Sundar Nagar Chhapra: This is a settlement of 150 households nearly 20 years old. It is located on railway land that was subsequently transferred to a private party. The settlement was razed to ground in last week of January by the builder with the help of massive police presence.