



A STUDY OF SHELTERS FOR THE URBAN HOMELESS (SUH) IN AHMEDABAD

(SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS)



Citizens for Shelter Alliance, Ahmedabad (CISHAA)

This report has been prepared through the joint efforts of the members of CISHAA, including

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- Habitat Forum (INHAF)
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Cover Image: Binal Gandhi

This report is the result of collaborative effort between the organizations and individuals mentioned above. This research was completed and drafted in March 2020, but it's wider dissemination was delayed due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. After review and inclusion of several updates, this version has been prepared for open dissemination and released in July 2021.

Published by: CISHAA (Citizens for Shelter and Housing Alliance, Ahmedabad)

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INTRODUCTION

Indian cities are experiencing rapid growth. This growth is being filled by a number of factors, including the natural growth in the population of cities, new urban areas and also rural to urban migration. This rapid population growth is placing a strain on the housing resources of most large cities in India. This is reflected in informal settlements spread across the cities, as the poor are priced out of formal areas within the city.

As per the census 2011, the number of homeless people in Ahmedabad City was 11293. Living conditions of the homeless are extremely poor and they face day to day challenges in accessing water, sanitation and shelter. The lack of housing also creates problems of security of belongings and safety of the individuals, particularly women and children.

In response to the crisis of homelessness and inadequate housing in Indian cities, the government has launched 2 major shelter related programmes. The first and most happiness seeking is PMAY (Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana), a housing program intended to ensure that no Indian family is without a house by 2022. This program is being implemented in urban areas through 4 verticals, each of which is focused on constructing new opened houses for its beneficiaries.

In order to address the needs of temporary shelter in urban areas, the government has launched the SUH - shelters for urban homeless scheme. This is an evolution of the earlier night shelters operated in many cities. Under this scheme, the government aims to ensure that every City has shelters where homeless population can be housed 24/7. The highlights of the scheme as per the implementation guidelines include:

- 24 Hour shelters as opposed to night shelters
- To be operated by social organizations
- Shelters which can act as aggregation points and access points for services
- Shelters to be provided for especially vulnerable groups
- Shelters to be designed from the point of view of families staying together
- Shelters to have facilities for basic day to day functions such as cooking space, utensils, toilets
- Shelters to have personal lockers for storage space
- Shelters to be built close to homeless work sites and concentrations based on systematic analysis of homeless populations in the city
- Each shelter to provide a minimum space of 50 sq ft per person

Various cities have started to implement this much needed and well-intentioned scheme and the guidelines themselves have gone through multiple revisions over time. In Ahmedabad, over 25 such shelters have been implemented and more are under construction. As the scheme has made progress, both the good results and implementation gaps of the scheme have started to be seen on the ground. In this context, it was felt by members of CISHAA that the time was right to do a thorough assessment of the functioning of the shelters in the ground, in order to be able to provide on ground feedback to the relevant authorities about the situation in the ground. We hope that this report will be able to highlight the positive points about the implementation so far in Ahmedabad as well as bring forth what more can be done to improve the implementation of the scheme.

This assessment is based on a primary survey of the shelters conducted by members of CISHAA. While the report used the guidelines of the SUH scheme as a baseline against which the shelters have to function, the primary survey also includes other indicators about the residents in the shelter in order to create a better understanding of the program. The emphasis is also given to understanding the physical use of the spaces within the shelter as well as the factors that may affect day to day aspects of the residents' lives, such as food and storage space.

We hope that this report can help the relevant stakeholders to improve the quality of the shelters and create a starting point for positive engagement between the stakeholders involved in the process.

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire survey was developed to explore the provisions and conditions at the homeless shelters, shelter management, use of the shelters, and the characteristics of the shelter residents and their experiences of living there. The survey was undertaken at 25 homeless shelters between June 2019 and September 2019 (see Table 1). At few of these shelters, the shelter staff did not allow proper access to the surveyors and therefore the survey form could not be fully completed.

Table 1. Surveyed Shelters

No.	Shelter name and address	No. of Dorms	Survey done by
1	Shelter below Jeevraj bridge	4	Aajeevika Bureau
2	Shelter below Maharshi Dadichi Bridge, Shahpur	2	
3	Shelter near Jhansi ki Rani, Shivananjini Cross Roads	2	
4	Shelter below Ishanpur Bridge	2	
5	Shelter below Acharya Mahapragyaji Overbridge, Gridhamagar, Shahibaug	2	
6	Shelter at Madhupura, Shahibaug	2	
7	Shelter below Guruji Bridge, Khokhra	2	Centre for Development (CfD)
8	Shelter below Nathalal Jagadiya Bridge, Maninagar	2	
9	Shelter under Midco bridge, Vatwa	2	
10	Shelter under Midco bridge, Vatwa	2	Human Development Research Centre (HDRC)
11	Shelter Under Memco Bridge, Saijpur	2	
12	Shelter Under Memco Bridge, Saijpur	2	Mahila Housing Trust (MHT)
13	Shelter in Saraspur near Everest Char Rasta, Near Saraspur UHC	2	
14	Shelter under Gota bridge, Chandlodia	4	Prayas
15	Shelter near Sola Cross Roads, Naranpura	2	
16	Shelter under Keshavnath Bridge, Road towards Sabarmati Jail, S.P Stadium	2	
17	Shelter under Chanakyapuri Bridge No.1, Gota	2	
18	Shelter next to Ghatlodiya UHC	2	
19	Shelter near India Colony	2	SAATH Charitable Trust

20	Shelter near Uday Estate, Odhav	2	
21	Shelter behind Bhikshuk Gruh, Odhav	2	
22	Shelter near Vastral Ring-Road Cross Roads	2	
23	Shelter under Jashodanagar Bridge	2	
24	Shelter Below CTM Bridge, Towards Indrapuri	2	
25	Shelter below CTM Bridge, Bhaipura Hatkeshwar	2	

Besides the 25 surveyed shelters, several shelters which were open could not be surveyed because the shelter staff did not permit the surveyors. Photographs were taken at the shelters in February 2020 to capture both the positive aspects as well as shortcomings.

It should be noted that while we were analyzing the data from the surveys and writing the report, the AMC was also gradually making improvements at the shelters. Therefore, the findings presented in this report will not be the current status of the shelters. However, we still hope that if the gaps and shortcomings found at the shelters during the survey still exist then they will be addressed with utmost priority, and that our broader recommendations will help the AMC and GULM, the nodal agency in the Gujarat government, in improving homeless shelters in Ahmedabad.



SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report presents the findings of a survey of 25 existing homeless shelters in Ahmedabad, assessing their quality and their use by different groups of the homeless. Based on these survey findings and a recognition of the process and challenges of urbanization in India, the report makes recommendations to improve both the existing shelters as well as make new shelters that can better meet the needs of the present and future homeless of the city. The recommendations are described in 2 parts – first part dealing with the improvements that can be made at the individual shelters and the second part dealing with macro level changes that need to be made to make the scheme more successful.

1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS AT SHELTERS

1.1 BETTER FACILITIES AT THE SHELTERS

The facilities at the shelters have improved compared to some years ago. However, further improvements are required. We recommend the following improvements – some require to be done on an urgent basis, while other improvements are to be done on a long-term basis:

1. *Provision of secure storage facilities* : At 4-5 shelters, residents have reported theft of belongings, cash and cell phones. We suggest that AMC make an enquiry into this matter and accordingly make the required provisions for secure storage facilities. Small lockable lockers can hold money, purse and cell phones. Large shelves that can help stack most of the belongings, were present in most shelters, but were few in nos. and need to be enhanced. If these too are lockable then those residents moving out temporarily can even lock them.
2. *Provision of adequate water*: All the shelters reported having municipal water connection and also most shelters reported having 24-hour running water in the toilets/bathrooms, which is a great improvement from the condition of the shelters few years ago. However, there are water problems at some shelters which should be addressed on an urgent basis. One of these shelters is the Shelter near Jhansi ki Rani, where shelter residents have to sometimes go outside the shelter for toilet use, bathing and washing clothes. At several shelters, the shelter staff reported having to sometimes call water tankers (municipal or private). While such issues of inadequate water are bound to occur sometimes, we recommend that AMC *improve its responsiveness* to such instances of inadequate water.

Water is the most basic requirement for life, and there must be a system in place that can provide municipal water tankers on an urgent basis, within a few hours, when water from the municipal water connection is not adequate. Sending water tankers after 10-15 hours creates immense difficulty for the shelter residents, especially for women who require water to maintain personal hygiene during menstruation. Also, most of the residents of the shelters do manual work and therefore they require water to maintain personal hygiene and health. Underground storage, must be made available at all places that have none, because it enables additional water storage and

can reduce this distress. It should be the responsibility of the managing agency to respond to such shortage quickly, rather waiting for Municipality to respond, and this unforeseen cost must be factored into the budget.

3. *Provision of potable drinking water at all the shelters:* Although several shelters store the drinking water separately, very few of them actually provide potable water. A simple filter contraption that is easy to clean must be provided and maintained, at all places, so that water for drinking is safe.

4. *Sanitation:* At several shelters, the shelter staff have reported issues with plumbing repairs and maintenance, overflowing toilets / sewers, garbage disposal and cleanliness. We recommend that AMC look into these issues and strengthen the system through which the shelter staff can make complaints as well as strengthen their systems for quickly resolving these issues when a complaint is received. Better still would be for organizations to manage those at their level, for which the AMC must provide budget. Awareness activities for better cleanliness as well as proper formation of Shelter Management Committees at the shelters can also help in encouraging shelter residents to maintain better cleanliness. It was observed that in some cases bathrooms were used to wash clothes and vessels. This caused inconvenience and unclean baths. Special *chokdis* for washing clothes and vessels must be structured into the design. And so also covered shed for drying washed clothes. The adequacy of the toilets to the ratio of residents has not been recorded. Yet as this did not come up as a major problem shows that this may not be the case. In a few shelters access to all available toilets was restricted as it was locked for staff use, or was broken or used for storage. This must be urgently corrected as access to toilets is a necessity and also part of the ODF program.

5. *Provision of cooking facilities:*
 - a. A few shelters reported availability of cooked food provided by the managing organization or through some linkage. In some shelters inhabited mainly by single males, cooked food was preferred, as also in the morning when there is a rush to leave for the nakas. However, the tribal migrants preferred to cook their own food as their diet varied. Thus the AMC must experiment with providing food for single male migrants along with the option of cooking facilities. In most cases small kitchens did not allow for cooking even in batches, and gas connections were missing in many. The shelters which have a separate room for kitchen, should be provided with gas connection and maximum number of gas stoves as allowed by the kitchen size. Cost for usage may be factored into the user fees, or AMC grants.

 - b. Where the kitchens are very small or there is no separate room for kitchen, the AMC must give proper thought to how cooking facilities can be provided. At some shelters, we have seen that covered sheds have been made so that residents can cook, including in monsoon. Such covered sheds should be made before the 2020 monsoon season, wherever there is adequate open space inside the shelter compound. In shelters where there is no covered space or very little covered space in the shelter compound, it might still be possible in some cases to erect a covered shed nearby or on the terrace, if possible. Residents living in shelters located under flyovers are at times cooking outside

the shelter compound under the flyover, but while the flyover gives protection from rain, a proper cooking space could be demarcated or erected, fenced and the ground levelled, and cleanliness activities may be extended to cover such a cooking space. AMC has done this in some cases, but it should be done across all the shelters. Until such time that uninterrupted gas supply is made available, fire wood may be allowed where there is adequate open space.

1.2 ENSURING BETTER ACCESS TO THE SHELTERS

At 2 shelters, it was reported that the residents cannot access the dormitories 24x7 (Shelter in Saraspur near Everest Char-Rasta and Shelter below Guruji Bridge). This should be looked into by AMC and necessary steps taken to ensure that all the dormitories are open 24x7 in all the shelters. At 2 shelters it was reported that homeless persons cannot come to the shelter anytime of the day or night (Shelter under Jashodanagar bridge and Shelter under Chanakyapuri Bridge No. 1 in Gota). AMC should take necessary steps to ensure that homeless persons can come to the shelter at any time. Some homeless persons might work till late at night and therefore return to the shelter late at night; some homeless persons may work during the night and return to the shelter in the early hours of the morning, and they should be able to access the shelter. New homeless persons should be allowed to approach the shelter at any time of the day or night as per their need. At almost all shelters, homeless people have to show a ID to access the shelter. It may be useful to ask for IDs, but many homeless persons fail to have one. In such cases entry must not be barred, instead support may be extended in preparing one.

1.3 SHELTERS THAT MEET THE NEEDS OF FAMILIES ALONG WITH OTHER GROUPS

1. The homeless shelters in Ahmedabad have not been designed with family rooms. Although a positive step has been taken at many shelters by opening one or more dormitories for family use, this arrangement does not give any privacy to families. It was also reported at some shelters that the shelter staff forces the men and women of the families to go into separate dormitories when comes for checking, which raises questions about whether the AMC and its staff actually supports this positive step. Furthermore, this positive step is not adequate.
2. It is important that shelters are designed with individual family rooms. As per the SUH Guidelines, for families living on the streets, family shelters may be provided with a special design for privacy, with shared common spaces. The SUH Guidelines also mention that depending on the need, a shelter may cater to working men, women and family with appropriate spaces demarcated for each of the categories. The survey findings also point towards the fact that substantial number of shelters in Ahmedabad are used by seasonal migrants, and also by a mix of household types (single men, single women, women with children, families), and while there is a dynamism in this regard, the shelters too must be designed and managed to dynamically support the needs of this mix of migrant and household types.

3. It may be worthwhile to note herein that it is better to understand the profile of homeless in Ahmedabad, which might have emerged from enumeration of homeless that included occupational data, etc., and design shelters accordingly.

1.4 SHELTER FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS

1. As per the SUH guidelines, special shelters for the physically and mentally challenged, the sick and elderly must be set-up. Several shelters had such residents in here. At one shelter, Jeevraj Bridge, separate dorm for the senior citizens was provided, and there were reports of women rescued through the Women Helpline 181, being accommodated. Although this is a very critical support, nevertheless it is true that such persons need to be specially cared for and persons with requisite skills must be available to care for them.
2. Provision of such professional care in SUHs is not known. Actually there are, even statutory facilities for the mentally challenged, destitute women and children etc., and to hold them in homeless shelters is inappropriate. This practice of bringing in the most vulnerable must be discouraged, unless professional help is available at the shelter.

1.5 SHELTER STAFF AND FACILITIES FOR THEM

1. While all the shelters had 3-6 caretakers, a few shelters reported not having a shelter manager. This aspect needs the AMC's attention. In fact, it was not clear in how many of the shelters a full-time shelter manager (as mandated in the SUH guidelines) was manager living at the shelter. Furthermore, at majority of the shelters, it was reported that not a single staff-person lived at the shelter. It is also a matter of concern that facilities have not been made at most of the shelters for a staff-person to stay, such as a separate room, separate toilet/bathroom and cooking place/gas, and these must be urgently provided.

1.6 LINKAGES TO SERVICES AND ENTITLEMENTS

1. As per the SUH Guidelines, shelters are supposed to be a space for convergence, provision and linkage of various entitlements of social security, food, education and health care systems for the residents, as well as to enhancement of livelihood standards.
2. While some efforts have been made in this direction, more needs to be done. This is also significant, given the fact that the homeless in many cases are one of the most vulnerable class of persons requiring state sponsored welfare and economic empowerment, the most. This is also particularly true of such women and children. As revealed in the data, 17 out of 25 shelters do enable some linkages, yet from the long list of such forward backward linkages mentioned in the guidelines, only 5 have been undertaken so far, the most common being health check-up, whose regularity was not certain.

3. This is one area, where more professional counseling and concerted action is required. Herein the data from the survey of the homeless will be useful. Another concern of many homeless persons it was observed was lack of ID and address proof, that was sought in 24 out of 25 shelters, and is the basic requirement to access government benefits. Concerted efforts must be made to procure ID and address proofs, for all such residents asap. One essential entitlement for most of the long term and permanent migrants is decent and semi-permanent or permanent housing facilities, for which critical linkage process must be undertaken. In fact the profile of the homeless residents must be seriously studied and counseling pursued to enable linkages to suitable housing schemes, wherein priority for this group must be included. A gradual up-scaling from the shelter to affordable rentals and finally towards owning a house may be considered, for it is all about decent housing rights.

1.7 FORMATION OF THE SHELTER MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE (SMC)

1. Only 7 of 25 surveyed shelters had formed a SMC, and even in these cases, a shelter volunteer in the SMC was reported at only 2 shelters, whereas as per the SUH guidelines, the SMC must have a shelter resident as a member. However, observation revealed that the role and functions of the SMC even where they were formed, were not clearly understood, and hence not followed as per SUH guidelines. More orientation and handholding support by AMC's supervisory staff is required.

1.8 MANAGEMENT MATTERS: -

1. Management persons and some system of governance and monitoring were in place in all SUHs. In 3 shelters, no manager was available. Caretakers over 3 shifts were available as reported, but woman caretaker as per guideline was not available in 3. In 17 shelters, no night staff was available, while in 3 the watchman was made to stay at night. All this was not according to the guidelines, and streamlining this is critical. Data in registers must be more standardized and uniform, in a way that the nature of residents and their needs can be studied from collated reports. There should be a form for the initial data collection that can contain more information than the daily registers. The compilation of data from these registers will provide very good information about the type of people who are using the shelters, and the analysis of this data will help to plan the shelters better.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE OVERALL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SCHEME

Since homelessness is not static, and the numbers of homeless persons can be expected to increase over the coming years in many Indian cities in the context of rural-urban migration – of both permanent and seasonal nature – it is of utmost importance that the city of Ahmedabad devise a long-term approach to respond to the issue in a humane and just manner. A few important considerations and approaches can be taken at the city level to help make the SUH scheme more effective at combating homelessness.

2.1 ADDRESSING THE SCALE OF HOMELESSNESS THROUGH SHELTERS

The homeless shelters in Ahmedabad which were surveyed here currently have the capacity to accommodate only 1272 homeless persons. As per various estimates of homeless population, this is only 10-20% of the capacity that the city needs to have. The most conservative estimate for the number of homeless as per the recent government survey is around 8095 individuals, and around 11,293 individuals as per census 2011.

To meet the needs of only the current homeless population, many more shelters are required in Ahmedabad. As the SUH guidelines mention, their locations should be such that they are close to where the homeless live. A strategy that is currently being employed is to add more beds to the shelters by using bunk beds. While an economical and space saving solution, it should also be noted that an increase in the number of residents at the shelter will also cause an increase in the requirement of other amenities such as cooking space, toilets, space for washing clothes, and storage space, which are already lacking in some shelters.

2.2 SEASONAL MIGRANTS AS A CRITICAL MASS IN THE SHELTER

At 15 shelters most residents and at 3 shelters all residents were seasonal migrants, and they actually constitute one of the largest categories of homeless. Most as we know from other studies are in the construction sector. However some from this community have shifted to working as waste collectors and unskilled workers in factories, or loaders on AMC waste collection dump trucks. It is pertinent to note that in spite of a separate Building and other Construction Workers Welfare (BOCWW) Board that specially collects cess for the welfare of these workers, and has amassed nearly 3000 crore, no effort to provide decent living conditions to these homeless migrants are undertaken by the Board. The Gujarat Urban Livelihood Mission, Urban development and Housing Department, and Labour department, along with the Board, must urgently converge processes to enable building and provision of decent housing for the construction workers in the city.

As seasonal migrants, these families need services that can adapt to their high degree of mobility. Linkages with education facilities or day care for children, welfare schemes of the BOCW, etc need to be facilitated for these migrants.

2.3 IMPROVING THE SPATIAL SPREAD OF THE SHELTERS

Spatial Spread: There are large number of shelters in Ahmedabad – At various stages of the survey, different numbers of shelters have been reported by AMC. The latest information received has indicated that there are 30 shelters out of which 27 are currently functional. While this is a large number, it is important to note that the spatial spread of these shelters is not even across the city. The Map 1. shows the location of the shelters. From the survey, residents at a majority of the shelters have reported that they walk approx. 2 km to their place of work or to a labor naka. Drawing a buffer of 2 km around these shelters, it can be seen that many parts of the city are not covered by any shelters.

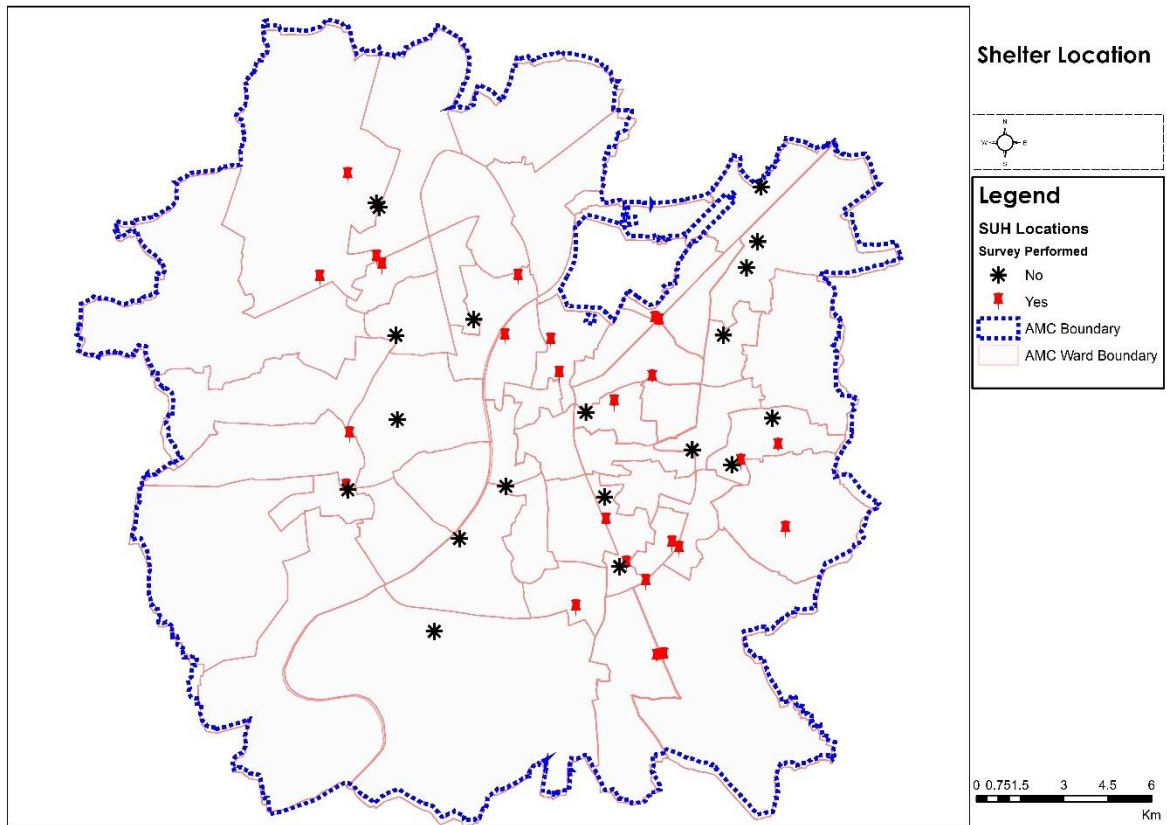
A greater capacity and properly designed shelters are needed to bridge these 3 critical gaps :

1. Overall city level capacity of the shelters
2. Spatial spread of the shelters
3. Making the shelters work for seasonal migrant families

A more spread open, decentralized approach towards the planning of these shelters needs to be taken. A few techniques that can be used to achieve this more decentralized spread can be:

1. Linkage of SUH with AHP schemes: Government Built housing schemes (AHP/PMAY) can be linked with SUH to spread out shelters more effectively across the city. Map 1 shows the location of the present SUH in Ahmedabad. The black symbols also include the locations where shelters were previously operating. If we combine the Locations of SUH with other public housing schemes as in Map 2, we can see that it becomes possible to cover a far wider geographic area.
2. Locations such as bus stands and railway station are not having SUH near them. Newly developing parts of the city, where migrant laborers come frequently in search of work such as Lambha are not having any SUH near them. There is only 1 SUH in Vatva, where there is large concentration of migrant industrial workers. Shelters need to be planned and implemented in such areas which need shelters. Labor Hostels: A distinction needs to be made between labour hostels and shelters. As indicated in few places in the survey, single male migrants prefer different things to family migrants, such as the availability of cooked food. Locations in developing parts of the city may need labor hostels more than family shelters, which would have a different design and different way of operation.

Map 1. Shelter Location with AMC Schemes (Source – Authors)



Map 2. Location of SHS and SUH Shelter in Ahmedabad (Source – Authors)

