

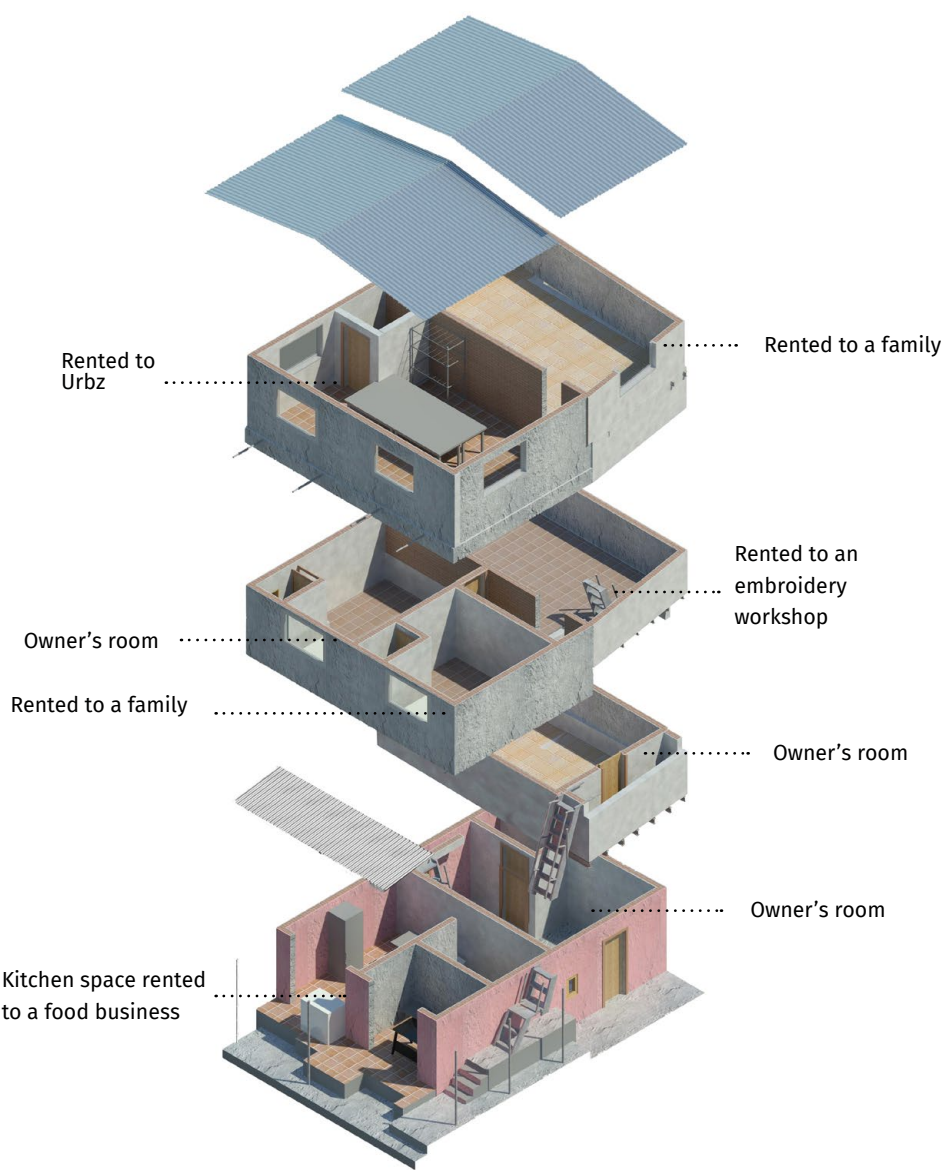


1st October 2020

One month after the extended lockdown ended on August 31st, we speak to our randomised sample set of 38 respondents once again to know how they

are coping. Based on their responses, and first hand observations of our very own team member in Dharavi, it seemed like life

had bounced back to normal. A few respondents went to the extent of saying, “It seemed like the lockdown never happened”. Our line of research in this newsletter attempts to understand the idiosyncrasies of Dharavi that allowed it to bounce back so quickly, while the rest of the city and country are still recuperating.



The Tool-house^[1]

Dharavi is home to approximately 20,000 factories and small businesses,^[2] while being home to more than 8,50,000^[3] residents. It is a hyper-mixed use settlement, with a hyper-linked network of economic and production chains. The concept of a tool-house embodies the smallest unit of this system; a house as a space for residency as well as economic activity. In Dharavi, the tool-house exists within a network of thousands of tool houses which amass a scale of production that satisfies the basic tenets of business economics and profitability, while fostering a sense of kinship and locality.

Picture illustrating the tool-house concept observed in the building which housed the URBZ office in Dharavi from 2010 to 2013

¹ <https://www.urbz.net/homegrown>

² <https://time.com/5892712/india-economy-covid-19/>

³ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/inside-dharavi-india-s-largest-slum-and-a-major-covid-hotspot/story-ZbX5VOngcJlmsK9F4ohBvM.html>

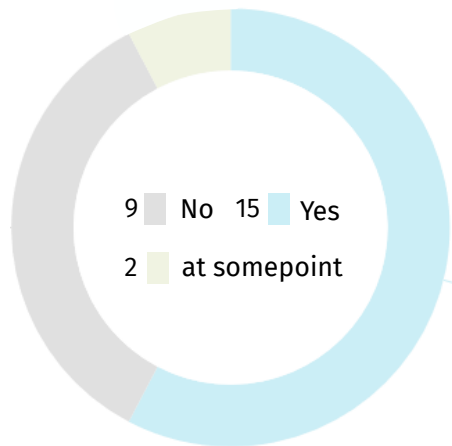
This network also satisfies the basic tenets of individual economics.

26 respondents have workspaces in Dharavi

9 respondents don't have workspaces in Dharavi

3 respondents have mobile workspaces

Thus the tool-house is an embodiment of a mixed-use structure as well as a mixed-use settlement. It is a character so intrinsic to the built fabric of Dharavi, and allows for an economically viable way for small production houses to sustain amidst the rising urban costs, while adding to Dharavi's \$1 billion economy.^[4]



The chart shows number of respondents who have their workspace in Dharavi and if their workspace is in the same building they live in. It also shows people who used to work from home at some point.

A Potter In Dharavi

Abbasbhai who belongs to Kumbharwada, began his workshop on the ground floor and home on the first floor. As his family expanded and needed more space, Abbasbhai moved his workshop next door. Most of his employees live in Kumbharwada or in Dharavi. *“In a pottery business, people are hired based on specific jobs, following a specific sequence of activities. Workers are needed at specific times, and living in the very next lane allows that,”* says Ashwin Wadhar, who has resumed work at Abbasbhai’s workshop and is producing stock for the upcoming festival of Diwali.

26 out of our 35 respondents have a work space in Dharavi, indicating a particular live-work setup prevalent in Dharavi. Out of the 9 with

jobs outside of Dharavi, 6 are salaried employees and only 3 ran entrepreneurial ventures. Our survey indicates that most respondents involved



Abbasbhai at his workshop in Kumbharwada, Dharavi

⁴ <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/dharavi-s-economy-goes-down-the-tubes-11587152095394.html>

Big ideas originate at home

Gyaan Rao, a 22 year old resident of Dharavi, wants to set up two business ventures with his friends; a garment shop and a stationery shop. Noticing a lack of stationary shops in his locality, he wants to start one on his street, and source the products for sale from Masjid Bandar. Gyaan is expecting his first order to arrive by 25th November, which he initially wants to store and sell out of his home. Because of his contacts in the neighbourhood^[5], he is sure of doing well with sales. Gyaan wants to procure garments whole-sale and sell at various weekly markets around the city. On days without any markets, he will be storing the goods at his home, and sell them locally. With a large family at home, he predicts that he will have to take up a shop on rent soon, but will manage from home for the time being since it is the most financially

in small-scale production or entrepreneurial activities prefer to live and work in close proximity. Our respondents’ definitions of workspace varies from a welding or a pottery workshop to an artist’s studio, from a tailor’s workstation to a home-based NGO setup, from garment traders business who uses his bedroom as storage to contractors who work out of their phone and project sites in Dharavi. This diversity in the idea of a workspace questions the understanding of the strict land-use often imposed on these settlements under the ambit of development.

What happened during the lockdown

Various phases of the lockdown imposed different

restrictions with different intensities during the 5 month long period. Additionally, the Indian economy has suffered a 23.9% contraction due to the economic lockdown^[6], having a direct impact on Dharavi’s production which caters to local, city, national as well as international customers. However, Dharavi was one of the first to resume business in Mumbai.

From our survey, we observed the commonalities between those who resumed economic activity. Proximity of workplaces to home, resources, suppliers, employees and customers were recurring factors facilitating quick resumption of our respondents’ businesses, while still recuperating from the economic aftermath of the lockdown.



Lockdown in Dharavi during the pandemic

⁵ <https://urbz.net/pdf/dharavi-millennials>
⁶ <https://time.com/5892712/india-economy-covid-19/>

For some however, the break in the demand cycle, no local trains, lack of local labour, kinks in supply of raw material, and the dependency on external business to resume normalcy are factors more impactful in prolonging closure of economic activity.

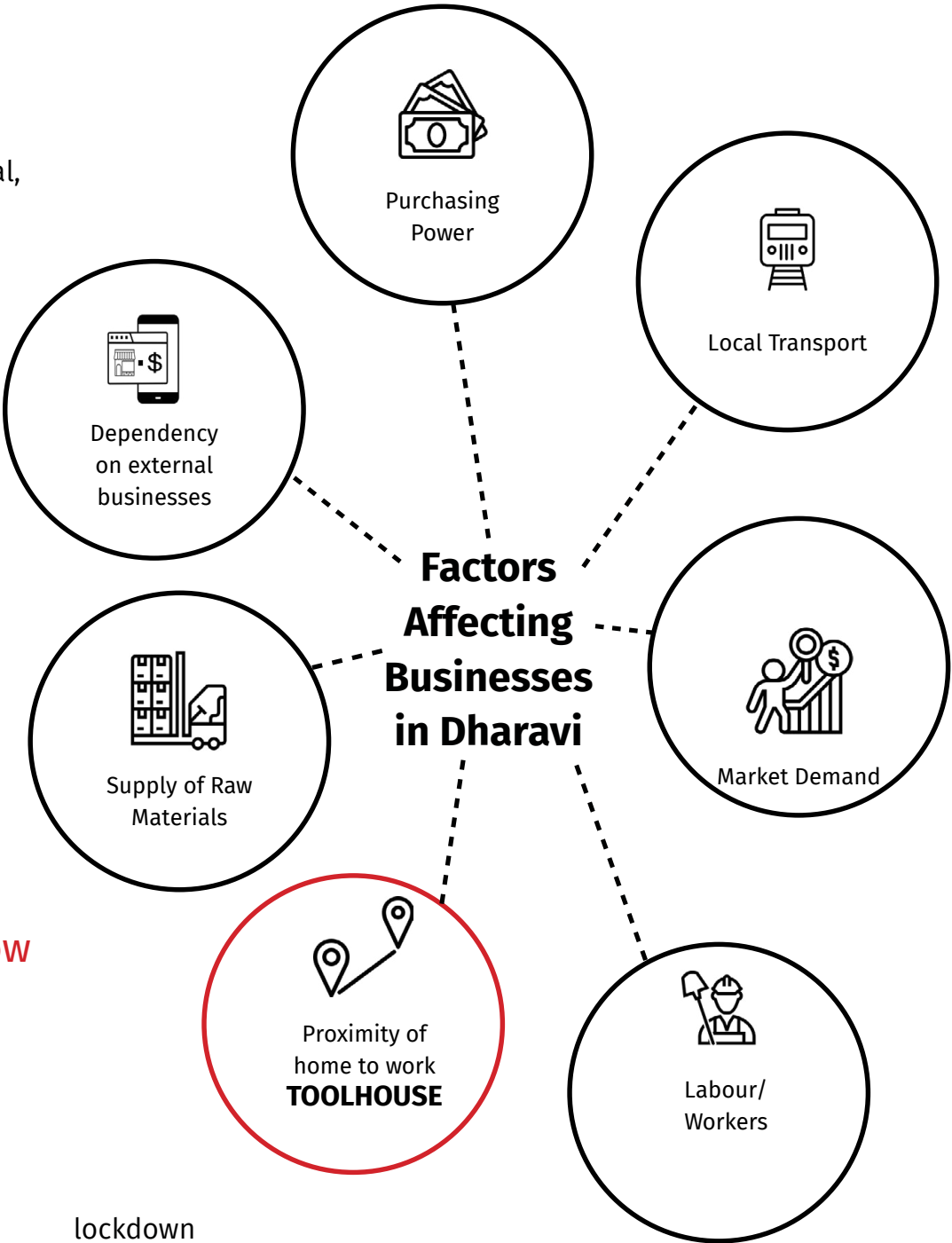
Did the tool-house help in resuming work faster?

25 of 38 respondents have already resumed work, though at a slow pace.

17 of these 25 have workspaces in Dharavi.

17 of 25 respondents who have workspaces in Dharavi said that this arrangement enabled them to resume work sooner after the lockdown.

This led us to analyse the economic resilience of Dharavi through the lens of spatial proximities, specifically through the concept of tool-house and their networks. While the



lockdown has left the majority in our country in a financially desperate situation and depleted savings, people of Dharavi jumped back to their feet and resumed work, however slow it may be, because they could. The close entanglement of residences with the economic fabric of the neighbourhood enabled them to do so. Even in the peak of the lockdown, Dharavi was producing masks, PPE kits and sanitizers by tens of thousands per day.^[7]

Most attributed this to physical access to their workspace during lockdown, and access to their network of resources. With the rest of the city crippled due to the restricted public transport systems, the tool-house removes the commute barrier from impacting business.

We further analysed our 15 respondents who work in a typical tool-house setup i.e. living and working in the same space, or work setup being on one floor and residential on

⁶ <https://urbz.net/unmasking-prejudice>

another of the same building. 9 out of 15 such respondents claimed to have resumed work, of which many are individual entrepreneurs such as contractors, brokers, musicians, artists and beauticians.

Of the **17** people whose work has resumed in Dharavi, **9** had their workspace in the same building.

This may indicate that businesses with lesser dependency on the demand-supply cycles of hard goods were able to kick start sooner. For production-related businesses such as tailors, plastic recycling etc., there was a greater dependency on city-wide chains of demand-supply. The spatial proximities and economic networks of the tool-houses within Dharavi could not provide the same benefits to people whose chains of demand-supply depended on city wide chains that were impeded due to the lockdown.

However, it must be noted that multiple factors affected the resumption of business, and the tool-house must not be studied in isolation. For example, 3 out of 5 of our respondents who are home-

How did the tool-house help post-lockdown?

Kavita Koli is a resident of Koliwada where she runs a parlour and tiffin service out of her house. Her parlour business runs out of the ground floor room, and she was able to start as soon as the lockdown lifted. She attributed this to her easy access to the parlour, as well as her employees and customers living in the neighbourhood itself. However, the number of customers and the average daily income has been severely impacted.

Gulzar Khan is a garment trader from Dharavi who usually sources his supplies from New Delhi, but procured the materials from the Wadala wholesale market (takes approximately 30 minutes of commute) during the lockdown. He stocks the supplies in his bedroom, explaining that he had a shop initially but since business didn't pick up as much, he is able to manage from his room. His family helps out when an extra pair of hands are needed. His work has resumed since most of his customers are within Dharavi, but since the purchasing capacity of people has been severely impacted, he is not able to sell any stock.



A street in Dharavi lined with tool-houses

based tailors are currently in their villages due to the pandemic, and unable to resume work. Others ran businesses connected to city-wide chains and linkages, which have not yet resumed. Local self-sufficiency in highly urbanised areas is extremely rare, and the built environment can only help that much when the external systems are decapitated.

One of our respondents is a papad-seller at a small stall outside her house. She has been unable to resume work since her stock of papad comes from Kalyan, and local trains are not functional yet. She has now taken up a job at the neighbouring Sion hospital where she works in the Covid ward. Another respondent runs a plastic shop in the same building where he lives but because the demand supply

chain is broken he has yet not resumed his business. He is now involved in social work activities in his locality until his business resumes.



A woman making pots at her house in Kumbharwada, Dharavi

Business as usual during the lockdown

Habib Tepu is a welding workshop owner in Dharavi, which is a 5 minute walk from home. He was able to continue his work throughout the lockdown. Though he gets his resources from Kurla metal market, he had stocked materials right before lockdown and that helped him continue his work. Another advantage was that all his workers were in Dharavi. The increase in thefts during lockdown made people order a lot of channel gates for security and because he has developed contacts and relations in Dharavi over the years, most of them approached him to place their orders. This kept him working during the lockdown even though all other businesses were shutting down.

It seems that small-scale production like pottery, welding, plastic etc. don't necessarily require a specific live up-work down situation, but supplies and resources as well as access and proximity to their customers to continue work during lockdown. This may indicate that a highly dense spatiality of residential, commercial and industrial functions provides a self-sustained ecosystem of resources such as material, manpower and customers for small-scale production houses to flourish.



Tailors working at a garment manufacturing workshop in Dharavi

9 of our respondents live in Dharavi but have their workplaces outside. Saving 2, they all expressed a desire to work in Dharavi or closer to home. However, Dharavi, being home to primarily small-scale businesses, does not provide the working environment, financial stability or aspirations they desire.^[8] During and after the lockdown, they are either working from home, unable to go to work due to transport restrictions, or let go, either temporarily or permanently. Many such respondents took up local tasks to keep the income flowing.

A resident of Dharavi, who worked as a light design technician in Andheri, started delivering milk in Dharavi in the mornings as he had no income from his job during the lockdown. His colleague began

selling vegetables in his own locality.

Most people in the production business preferred to establish their workspace in very close proximity. However, those who chose to do it outside Dharavi did so to get closer to their source of raw material or those they supply to. They intend to live closer to their workplaces and establish a base within their economic networks, creating tool-house networks elsewhere.

An interviewee who runs a fabrication workshop at Grant Road, agrees that having his house and workspace closer would have been easier. He cannot do so as most of his resources are obtained from Grant Road, but he cannot move there because of the high real estate prices. Another interviewee and his father run

a business of carton boxes in Bhiwandi. They initially started off from their home, with a shop on the ground floor and house on the first floor. Eventually, they shifted their business to Bhiwandi since their main supplier moved their setup to Bhiwandi. The family has a flat in Bhiwandi as well.

Tool-house: a model of resilience?

Out of **30** respondents who said their live-work situation has helped with more efficient work **26** have their workspace in Dharavi.

For those who have resumed work within Dharavi, all out respondents corroborate to the closely linked live-work setups playing an important role in improving work efficiency during pre and post lockdown conditions.

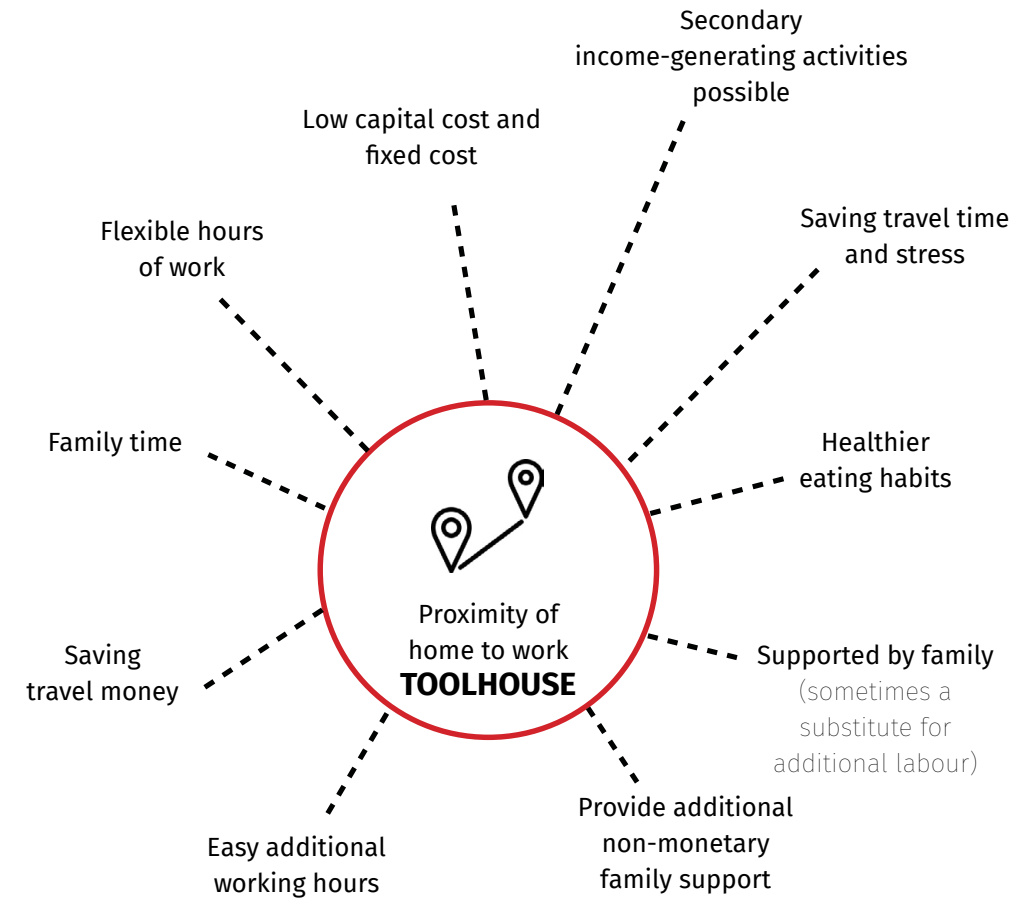
Due to the diversity in nature of workspaces, their spatial quality, scale and type of businesses, and employer or employee positions, tool-houses can embody both positive and negative attributes to the quality of life and work. While it serves as one of the

⁷ <https://urbz.net/pdf/dharavi-millennials>

most economically-productive and affordable spaces for many in Dharavi, the tool-house also meets concerns regarding the family setup interfering with productivity or vice versa, compromises with the living conditions and lifestyle, or having to live away from family in certain cases. However, most of the respondents with such concerns had either acclimatized to such conditions or took to this setup as a transient situation.

Habib Tepu, a fabrication business owner, chose to open his business next door as he wanted to capitalise on the social capital built here since childhood to aid in his business.

Such robust systems of close-knit economic networks and social capital tends to be a preference for most people in Dharavi, whether they be business owners, self-employed individuals or employees. Tool-houses, where economic and social transactions overlap constitute a greater resilience than standalone economic and social ecosystems. This form of resilience stems from individual mettle, community ties and economic networks to achieve a level of local self-sufficiency.



Common reasons cited by the respondents for resuming business, aided by the tool-house setup

Spatial proximity aids work flexibility

Vidya Mane occupies a clerical position at a school close to her house. The proximity of her house and school has allowed her to focus on her social work ventures; an NGO called Bhoomi Swachata Foundation and a *Bachat Gat* (Women’s Self Help Group). The school’s proximity to her house opened up more time and flexible working hours, which she diligently spent on her social ventures. She operates these ventures from her house, where they live on the top floor and has given the ground floor on rent. She is currently planning to turn the ground floor into an office for the NGO. She feels that such an arrangement has helped her balance her work at school and NGO and her family relations have been stronger as her husband and kids support her in what she does.