

Slum Upgrading: Lessons Learned in Nairobi

The following article is based on a consultative report on the conditions of informal settlements and slum upgrading initiatives in Nairobi, Kenya. The report, entitled "Nairobi Situation Analysis"* (Nairobi, 2001), was a first step in a newly launched collaborative initiative led by the Government of Kenya and UNCHS (Habitat) to improve informal settlements and reduce urban poverty in the country's capital city. The report was researched and compiled by a team of three resource experts from the University of Nairobi: Professor Paul M. Syagga, Dr. Winnie V. Mitullah and Dr. Sarah Karirah Gitau.

Kenya's capital city, Nairobi, hosts some of the most dense, unsanitary and insecure slums in the world. Slum dwellers constitute the majority of the city's population; an estimated 60 per cent of the city's official total population of 2.5 million people lives in slums and informal settlements. With an annual growth rate of 5 per cent, the municipality will host 5 million people by the year 2020, of which nearly 3 million will live in informal and often precarious settlements, if current trends continue.

Life in Nairobi's slums is not easy by any standard. As many as 1200 people live on one square hectare, sometimes in shacks as small as 10 by 10 feet. Provision of basic services is extremely scant or non-existent. As many as 400 people can end up sharing one toilet. Besides eroding the dignity and self-respect of residents, the sharing of one toilet by so many people is the cause of many health and environmental problems in the slums. Water, electricity, cooking fuel, education, health care, adequate shelter, and financial services are in short supply, except in small quantities and at extremely high unit costs. Cash flow is tight; average monthly spending rarely exceeds 3000 Kenya Shillings (approximately US\$ 40), of which 30 per cent is often allocated to housing. Employment necessary to support such spending is precarious. It varies from part-time casual labour in the formal sector (industrial and domestic), to petty trade, small-scale manufacturing, and illicit activities.

Tenure for many who live and work in the settlements is insecure. 1.5 million people are confined to less than 5 per cent of the total municipal residential area, The population is not only squeezed, it is also subject to uncertainty associated with ambiguous and irregular land allocation, commonly referred to as "land grabbing". The State owns 50 per cent of this land officially. However, individuals have over time negotiated informal arrangements with the authorities to erect structures and collect rents. The result is that most slum dwellers are tenants. Structure owners are under no obligation to maintain premises or provide basic services. The ambiguous tenure status of those living and working in informal settlements - structure owners and tenants alike - prohibits them from enjoying their rights as urban citizens. They are not recognized officially by the State and as such do not participate in decision-making processes that affect them.

Historical context

Informal settlements in Nairobi have grown gradually since 1902 when the British colonial government officially founded the City of Nairobi. So too have the responses to regulating and upgrading the settlements. Colonial government policy towards informal settlements was predicated on containment, labour supply, public health and racial segregation.

At independence in 1963, the Government of Kenya balanced the expectation of emancipation for land and shelter with a policy of containment and slum clearance then prevalent internationally. Slum clearance led to the proliferation of new slums, giving rise to new policies, including site and service schemes of green-field development. The schemes were successful in meeting some of the demand for shelter, but they tended to exclude target groups from the planning process and were subject to corruption in the allocation procedures due to shortage of supply.

In 1986, the Government ushered in the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), which were expected to lead to economic growth. SAPs required that the State withdraw from service provision and government subsidies. Needless to say, this adversely affected the poor, who had to dig deeper into their pockets to benefit from cost-sharing services, such as health care and education. Service provision in the country's urban slums deteriorated. The Nairobi City Council, which is charged with the provision and management of services within its jurisdiction, could not cope with the problem due to a combination of factors: the poor economic situation; rapid population growth; limited resources; inefficient revenue collection; strict control by the Ministry of Local Government; and poor management. On their part, donors had no clear approach to working with informal settlements; they lacked coordination and did not view "urban" as a funding category.

Apart from churches, which have historically supported the urban poor, many civil society organizations sprung up in response to the State's withdrawal from urban services provision. While focused on relief and welfare activities, they managed to improve education, sanitation and refuse removal in some settlements, albeit on a very limited scale. More recently, however, slum dwellers have begun organizing themselves into federations to present a unified voice against forced evictions and "land grabbing".

Lessons learned from past initiatives

Due to the very complex nature of informal settlement development in Nairobi, attempts to upgrade slums have had mixed results. Past upgrading projects in Kenya have had both strengths and shortcomings at policy level. The shortcomings include: lack of affordability, high standards for infrastructure, land tenure complications, and administrative inefficiency.

Affordability has been a major problem for the poor. The case is clearer in the development of sites and services schemes, where affordability is determined before development begins. Another drawback faced in upgrading programmes is the high standards set for housing, infrastructure and service provision. Although lower standards

were applied, they were still beyond the means of the poor, for whom they were intended. To complicate matters even further, upgrading was permeated by political interests that distorted the allocation of infill plots. Rather than being allocated to the displaced poor, the plots found their way into the hands of non-target groups that had political influence. Moreover, upgrading during the 1970s and 1980s was premised on the false belief that most residents of informal settlements owned the plots on which the structures were built. The policy focused on the wrong group - the owners of the structures who did not live in the settlement.

The way forward

The primary constraint to the improvement of the living conditions of informal settlements in Nairobi is, and remains, insecure land tenure. This has led to the prevailing situation where absentee landlords build semi-permanent rooms for rent without providing adequate water and other environmental sanitation facilities for their tenants. Poor and inadequate access routes within these settlements also hinder service improvements.

To be meaningful, a slum upgrading programme has to ensure that land tenure is secured for the majority of residents (who, in the case of Nairobi, are tenants); this will have to be done through a consultative process that engages both structure owners and tenants. More importantly, to support the efforts of the poor, key stakeholder groups (residents, NGOs, the private sector, donors and all levels of government) have to be involved in the development of infrastructure and service provision. For low-income urban services to be more effective, there is need to streamline and remove bottlenecks in the administrative practices in municipal and other urban administrative units. This requires efficient urban governance, which is able to react rapidly and flexibly to growing settlement problems.

However, ensuring secure tenure for Nairobi's poor is fraught with difficulties, including lack of political will. From the 1960s to the early 1990s, the urban poor were not organized and had no political leverage. Moreover, some policy makers were partisan in that they had a vested interest in the status quo vis-à-vis informal settlements - as absentee landlords. However, since the beginning of the 1990s, with the advent of political pluralism and the emergence of new democratic spaces, the poor have been organizing and demanding rights to land and to urban services. This is changing housing development dynamics in the city and there is hope of having successful upgrading in the future.

In November 2000, the Government of Kenya and UNCHS (Habitat) agreed to pursue a joint slum-upgrading project to confront the issue of informal settlements on a citywide scale and in a systematic manner. Early this year, a situation analysis of Nairobi's informal settlements was undertaken. The primary aim of the Nairobi Situation Analysis consultative report is to document and analyze the conditions on the ground in order to provide the basis for constructive debate and discussion among key stakeholders, especially people living and working in slum areas. The report is the first and most important input to the Collaborative Nairobi Slum Upgrading Initiative. It is also intended to contribute to other initiatives presently ongoing in Kenya, including the

anticipated "Third Nairobi Metropolitan Development and Management Strategy (2001-2030)".

*The above summary of the "Nairobi Situation Analysis" report was prepared by Rasna Warah, Editor of Habitat Debate.

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The Kampung Model

By Johan Silas

Immediately after the economic crisis of the late 1990s in Indonesia, architectural students from the Institute of Technology in Surabaya went to visit people in low-income urban settlements (Kampungs) to learn about how they were coping with the crisis. To their surprise, they found that the economic crisis had had little impact on the Kampungs. In fact, housing conditions in the Kampungs were getting better, as shown in the 1999 national economic and social survey. This trend was later supported by the results of the 2000 population census. These results convinced Surabaya, the second largest city in Indonesia, that the Kampung Improvement Programme (KIP) was working.

KIP was re-introduced to Surabaya and Jakarta in the late 1960s to bring urban development closer to low-income people. This approach consists mainly of the provision of urban services to complement the housing process provided by the people themselves. KIP has five important objectives:

- To strengthen and recognize the Kampungs, which house 60 per cent of Indonesia's urban population;
- To integrate the Kampungs with urban housing and services systems;
- To increase Kampung community participation and empowerment;
- To stimulate the social and economic mobility of the inhabitants; and
- To ensure the sustained improvement of the quality of life in Kampungs.

Surabaya enjoys a long history of KIPs. Surabaya and Semarang were the two cities that first implemented KIP in 1924, which focused mainly on sanitation. In late 1960s, Jakarta and Surabaya reintroduced and remodelled KIP. Surabaya managed to develop many models, including participatory approaches in the inner city and fringe areas. In late 1970s, KIP was implemented as a national programme in all urban areas of the country.

After most of the Kampung in Surabaya had been improved, it was concluded (as part of the periodic evaluation in early 1990s) that the speed in the improvement of the Kampung conditions could not keep up with the speed of achievements reached at city scale. Working with the Laboratory of Housing and Human Settlements of the Institute of Technology, the Comprehensive KIP (C-KIP) was introduced in mid 1990s. The emphasis was on community development using institution building (to include revolving credit schemes) and infrastructure improvement as a means to strengthen community involvement in building Kampung.

About 20 Kampung in Surabaya have so far implemented the C-KIP with encouraging results. The prospect of this approach is to strengthen and increase the role of Kampung as means to synergise the potential of the lower income urban population to make the city more competitive in relation to the demands and challenges of globalization.

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Cebu's Community Mortgage Programme

The scale of housing need in the Philippines is immense. In Cebu, more than half the population is either homeless or landless. The Local Government Code (1991) transferred additional responsibilities to local government, while the Urban Development and Housing Act (1992) sought to encourage greater investment in social housing. Even before that legislation, the Government has established a nationally-financed Community Mortgage Programme (CMP), implemented by a wide range of institutions, and which provided subsidized loan finance to regularize and improve low-income squatter settlements. In the Philippines, it has so far assisted 100,000 families to legalize their land tenure.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the city government established the Cebu City Commission for the Urban Poor. One of the objectives of the Commission was to take forward housing efforts in the city. In Cebu, the CMP has been nurtured due to the strength of the local economy, the alliance between the mayor and the urban poor, and the local presence of one of the designers of the programme, who is a long-standing resident and NGO activist in the city. A number of positive steps have been taken, including a shortening of the time required to process CMP applications from two years to six months. Over 4000 families in the city have benefited from CMP loans in 65 different improvement projects. CMP sites are also eligible for basic services (footpaths, electrical posts, artesian wells, drainage and roads), with the government providing materials and the community completing the works.

The low-income community in Inayawa is a perfect example of how partnerships between national governments, local authorities, NGOs and communities can provide housing solutions for the urban poor. Residents of Inayawa first occupied a privately

owned piece of land in the 1960s. In 1985, the owner of the land sought a court order to evict the residents, and this was eventually granted in 1988. Residents had to make repeated appeals to the demolition team to prevent their homes from being destroyed. They then lobbied the Mayor, Thomas Osmena, at his home very early one Sunday morning. He agreed to seek a court order to prevent demolition and referred their case to the Cebu Commission for the Urban Poor. As a result, and with the help of a local NGO, the Pagtambayayong Foundation, the residents organized themselves into an association (SISARO) and obtained a CMP loan. With this loan, they purchased the land in 1990 with the certificate of title being in the name of the community. Plots range in size from 25 square metres to 163 square metres. The loan was repayable at 12 per cent interest over five years (later extended to seven years). All except one of the members have repaid the loan, but because of one default, it has not yet been possible to individualize the title. The residents have constructed a pathway through the settlement using collective labour and materials provided by the City. In 2000, the City provided a 6 meter access road and the Mayor provided materials for the construction of drainage.

Source: "Urban Governance and Urban Poverty: Lessons from a Study of Ten Cities in the South", The School of Public Policy, University of Birmingham, U.K., June 2001