

GLOBAL SLUM UPGRADING PRACTICES: IDENTIFYING THE CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

Over the years, human settlement experts have utilized a number of intervention strategies for integrating slums and informal neighbourhoods into their larger urban context. Yet these practices are continually trailed by challenges and reactions from built-environment professionals and other stakeholders. It is therefore imperative that the quest for an acceptable approach to slum intervention is yet to abate. A literature review methodology was adopted to identify and appraise the various intervention models that were practiced in some developing nations. Although slum upgrading option was adjudged to be the current global best practice, it is still besieged by several imperfections. Some weaknesses and challenges that are applicable to developing countries, particularly Nigeria were identified in this study. The paper suggests policy measures for mitigating these challenges.

Keywords: *In-situ upgrading, participatory upgrading, slum improvements, slum prevention, slum upgrading.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the last 20 years slum upgrading has increasingly been regarded as the most effective method for mitigating the problems faced by slum dwellers (UN-habitat, 2010). The goal is to integrate the communities into their larger urban context. The outcomes are usually experienced at the level of the individual, neighbourhood and urban housing. This study is based on literature review methodology, which is generally referred to as non-contact, desk-based, secondary or library-based research. Thus the study examined what the research literature reveals about slum upgrading practices across the developing world in order to identify current debates and challenges confronting urban planners, architects, residents, governments and other urban management experts and diverse stakeholders. Concepts, points of view and evidence-based case studies were explored to find out how they support or contradict the knowledge-base surrounding slum upgrading practices and challenges.

A critical analysis of the gaps in knowledge was used as a guide to point the way to the future by providing insights that have been neglected or passed over in the past.

The procedure adopted involved careful secondary analysis and evaluation of explicit themes on slum upgrading. Non-structured qualitative analysis was applied to make the review of identified themes distinctive. Hence the literatures that were collected on selected themes were subjected to logical analysis, reasoning, synthesis and dialectical thinking. The paper begins by identifying different intervention models that were in vogue for dealing with slum improvements, until a few decades ago. Thereafter, the paper takes an overview of slum upgrading strategies that many scholars regard as the contemporary best practices. Finally, the paper identifies some weakness and challenges of slum upgrading that are applicable to Nigeria and other developing nations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Types of Interventions Dealing With Slum Improvements

UN Habitat (2003) has identified the most common intervention styles for dealing with slums as follows: Negligence (Benign neglect, laissez fair), eviction and clearance, insitu upgrading, enabling policies and resettlement. Responses to slums have changed over the years. Policies that aim at benign neglect, forced eviction, clearance and involuntary resettlements have become very unpopular.

Forced eviction and clearance model is based on the concept of redevelopment of slums and requires the resettlement of its residents. In many countries, slum eviction is applied as an urban re-engineering tool by the government. Evidence of slum eviction practices abound in a number of countries. Between January 18 and 21, 2013 an estimated 1,512 households (about 5000 persons) were evicted from Ejipura, Bangalore, South Africa. In Johannesburg, about 10,000 people were evicted between 2002 and 2006 (Masses, 2014). Forced eviction and clearance model was witnessed in Harare, Zimbabwe in a 2005 exercise tagged Operation Murambatsvina (Restore Order). The operation was characterized by demolition and burning of 92,460 houses and the displacement of 700,000 people (International Crisis Group, 2005; Tibaijuka, 2005).

In Nigeria, evidence from Lagos alone indicates that over 700,000 inhabitants were known to have suffered eviction from their residences in the past two and half decades (Morka, 2012). Among the several eviction experiences in Lagos, three were most prominent: Maroko, Badia, and Makoko. The case of Maroko occurred in July 1990 when the Military Government forcibly evicted about 300,000 residents. It was estimated that 41,776 landlords were rendered homeless in Maroko's large land space of about 11,425 hectares adjacent to Ikoyi and Victoria Island areas of Lagos State. The guise employed by the government was to improve the urban space by addressing the housing problems of low-income group in Lagos (Agbola and Jinadu, 1997; Alagbe, 2010). But it turned out to be a selfish motive as government later appropriated the land for the rich without proper settlement of original inhabitants (Ige and Nekhwevha, 2014; Alagbe, 2010). In place of Maroko, what exists today is known as Oniru Housing Estate that serves the bourgeoisie. Badia, as it is known today, served as a resettlement abode for people who were forcibly evicted in 1973 from their ancestral homes in Oluwole Village, which now accommodates the massive National Arts Theatre. Most of the villagers were haphazardly resettled in Badia which later became one of the largest slum settlements in Lagos.

A joint report by Amnesty International and Social economic Rights Action (SERAC) indicates that Badia's residents suffered another eviction recently on February 23, 2013 when 266 homes for nearly 9,000 inhabitants were demolished by the State Government (Amnesty International, 2014). The situation of Makoko was not different. In April, 2005 over 3,000 residents suffered eviction as their homes were burnt by the agents of State. The shanty fishing settlement suffered a similar fate again on Monday 16th July 2012 when the Lagos State Government deployed bulldozers to demolish the houses majority of which were built on stilts after a 72-hour eviction notice (Ige and Nekhwevha, 2014).

The adverse consequences and impacts of forced eviction have been well documented. According to Macphson (2013), Slum clearance is widely unpopular today and is now rarely pursued. If anything, it further entrenches the poverty of the residents by removing their homes and destroying the frameworks they had established. In the case of Maroko, Agbola and Jinadu (1997) observed that the housing problem of the urban poor became significantly worse because most evacuees were compelled to relocate to other slum environments, thus reinforcing the cycle of slum development. According to Omirin (2003), this approach is socially destructive, with great economic cost to the community. In other words, dwellings are lost and residents are dispersed to either form new slums or exacerbate the precarious situation of existing squatter settlements. Dipont (2008) points out a similar experience in Delhi where the destruction of slums without adequate rehabilitation led to the creation of new squatter settlements or the densification of existing slums. It is further claimed that eviction and demolition of slums generally lead to destruction of housing investments or fixed capital made by the residents hence the affected households remain systematically impoverished (Ige and Nekhwevha, 2014). Oftentimes, such evictions create loss of social and safety networks, family disintegration, psychological and emotional trauma which may lead to death.

Slums in Strategic locations where land values have risen substantially are cleared to accommodate office buildings, luxury apartments, malls and infrastructure that tend to benefit wealthier households. UN-Habitat recommends that slum clearance option can only be applied if insitu upgrading is not possible and not wanted by the affected community (for example, in cases of hazardous locations). The resettlement process leads to all affected households living in adequate houses with no one being worse-off than before. Such an exercise was seen in Brazil when inhabitants were relocated from Samambaia between late 1980's and the early 1990's.

On the other hand, policies that focus on slum upgrading have been considered to have significant advantages over other types of approaches. Upgrading of slums involves physical, social, economic, organizational and environmental improvements to the present informal settlements and slums. According to Ehigiator (2013), the results of Slum upgrading include (UN-Habitats & City Alliance, 2006);

- improvement of basic infrastructure;
- removal of environmental hazards;
- improving access to health care and education; and
- improving opportunities for income earning.

2.2 Overview of Slum Upgrading Strategies

Slum upgrading in the 1980's developed from the works of John Turner (Werlin, 1999). The adoption of slum upgrading strategies marked a dramatic twist in official stance towards slums and informal settlements. Upgrading Programs are regarded as locality-based improvement strategies designed to address the various degrees of obsolescence and decay in slum areas through the production or improvement of basic services and physical infrastructure (World Bank, 2000).

In contrast to previous intervention strategies, upgrading programs occur with minimum loss of physical assets and disruption of livelihoods and social support systems. It is also claimed that slum upgrading is cheaper than other strategies. In fact, Arcila (2008) asserts that it can cost up to ten times less than clearance or relocation. Other advantages of slum upgrading over previous methods as identified by Arcila are:

- It avoids the social and economic disruption of the community; and
- Its results are highly visible within a short span of time.

In situ slum upgrading and participatory slum upgrading are two variants of slum upgrading that are described as today's best practice. In situ upgrading refers to improvement of existing settlements. This approach involves:

- upgrading existing dilapidated roads or foot paths;
- providing public toilets or bathrooms;
- sinking boreholes to provide water;
- building new schools and upgrading old ones;
- building health facilities;
- empowering the youths through skill acquisition; and
- building capacity.

Motivations and government responses in choosing a particular approach is generated and guided by the political context. In Brazil, for example, three cities were compared and it was found that the performance of in situ slum upgrading depends on the severity of distortions in land and credit market, and the policy initiatives to correct them (Dasgupta and Lall, 2006). The analysis identified improvement in land, infrastructure and building quality as the three most important interventions, particularly if the aim is to improve quality of life for households living in sub-standard residential units (Dasgupta and Lall, 2006). The site and services approach to slum upgrading was not particularly successful due to lack of access to housing finance. The situation can be improved if security of tenure is regularized and made less cumbersome. These findings from Brazil are applicable to other developing countries.

The concept of in situ upgrading is based on the belief that allowing residents to remain in these communities is both socially and economically more effective (Jaitman and Brakarz, 2013; Belford, 2013). According to Abdenur (2009), in situ upgrading keeps the social networks of the dwellers and the cohesiveness of the community intact while improving their living standards. Furthermore, it helps to ensure that investments already made by the families in their homes are capitalized and incentivized, leaving them in a better economic position. The concept of participatory slum upgrading is based on the argument that community participation is essential to achieve better development outcomes (Turner 1996; Hamdi, 2010). It is a cost saving strategy.

Wakely and Riley (2011) noted that participatory approach was used in Syria and Ghana. In Aleppo, Syria, the occupants of many informal settlements were able to successfully install relatively sophisticated waterborne sewerage systems with no formal technical assistance and at no capital cost to the state. The case of Cooperative Housing Foundation in Ghana which utilized community builders as a self-help strategy is another example. The concept of participatory upgrading was not popular during the 1970's and 1980's. The planners of slum upgrading projects at that time merely assumed what they believed were user's needs and demands, with little or no consultation. One of the few notable exceptions was the Lusaka Upgrading Project (Wakely and Riley, 2011).

Therefore in implementing participatory slum upgrading programs, strong local organizations should be in place, such as Churches, Mosques and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's). So community building is a compelling priority. The community-based groups' involvement takes the form of decision-making, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and maintenance levels. It is important to note that every model of slum upgrading has its weaknesses and challenges. In future and for slum prevention, government may need to examine some of the challenges outlined in the next section of this paper.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Weaknesses and Challenges of Slum Upgrading

The literature examined in this study revealed certain weaknesses and challenges associated with slum upgrading practices. The findings are important to developing countries. They are classified into eleven categories. The sequence of the discussion of the factors is not indicative of the weight ascribed to each.

3.2 Politicization of slum upgrading program

The selection of beneficiaries for existing slum upgrading presents a myriad of challenges as policy makers seek to balance priorities, issues of political patronage and the potential for corruption. According to Jaitman and Brakarz (2013), the criteria for choosing locations for slum upgrading can be administrative, political, technical, due to strategic planning or due to other factors. The ultimate selection reflects both regional and complicated decision-making process. Ndukui (2013) contends that varied political, cultural and religious inclinations among various stakeholders in the slum are in conflict. They are a major drawback to the program, because they slow down decision making.

Another challenge is a co-ordination problem among stakeholders. This happens frequently at inter-agency level of government where different ministries are in charge of different components of the slum upgrading exercise – housing, infrastructure, physical planning, environment, etc. At community level, this manifests in the form of elite control, elite capture and corruption. Elmhirst (1999) relates slums improvement progress to political survival strategies meant to manipulate the poor among slum dwellers for selfish reasons.

3.3 Misconceptions and Negative Perceptions

The phenomenon of slums and upgrading are not generally well understood. More often than not, public interventions address the symptoms rather than the underlying causes. On a different perspective, Ndukui (2013) remarks that slum upgrading initiatives are disadvantaged by slum dwellers' ignorance, lack of knowledge and skills to cope with challenges. The author recommends that effective slum upgrading should include capacity building of beneficiaries, to enhance independence, rights awareness and sustainability of local initiatives. In Kenya, a recent study revealed that lack of information, coupled with the general failure of several past slum upgrading projects to benefit the majority of the targeted slum dwellers has led to a general distrust towards the project (Amnesty International, 2009)

3.4 Planning Design and Institutional Issues

At the very heart of urban upgrading projects are needs and demands of people. These needs and demands are expected to be clearly identified, understood and prioritized. However, research into Kenyan slum upgrading programs identified several institutional and program design challenges that have hindered their successful implementation, despite strong backing from the government. For instance some projects were designed with community participations as a principal element. However the process of community participation was eventually flawed as it was found that the communities targeted by the upgrading project did not appear to have been fully engaged.

The purpose of slum upgrading is to ensure that slum dwellers have access to basic services like water, sanitation, waste collection, housing, access roads, foot paths, storm drainage, lighting, schools, health posts, etc. Ndukui (2013) however points out that in reality most slum upgrading programs are focused on housing improvements at the expense of other slum livelihoods. This is a challenge because addressing housing alone will adversely affect the outcome, which is geared towards improving the overall quality of life of slum dwellers. A more comprehensive approach is desirable.

3.5 Land and Tenure Matters

Commitment to large scale slum upgrading programs will necessarily involve policy reforms in land regulations (UN-Habitat, 2006). A major challenge in slum neighbourhood is that the land space is conscripted and may not be able to cater for all the residents after an upgrading exercise. Upgrading process almost inevitably requires the demolition of some dwellings to pave way for infrastructure runs, sites for schools and clinics, and the removal of dangerously located dwellings. Worse still is the scarcity of land for relocation where necessary.

On security of tenure, bureaucracy is regarded as one of the greatest impediments to slum dwellers. Suggestions for improving the situation have been propounded by some researchers. The World Bank (2006) recommends that security of tenure could be regularized through property mapping, titling and registration. In another perspective a study of the upgrading mechanisms of the Baan Mankong Program points out that various problems relating to security of tenure, financial support, and self-governance were initiated through active engagement of the community as actors (Boonyabanha, 2005).

A similar approach was adopted in the Tanzania-Bondeni upgrading outside Nairobi, depicted as one of the most successful of such schemes in Kenya.

Central among the factors that contributed to its success was the adoption of communal land tenure. Land was owned through a Communal Land Trust (CLT). This ensured that beneficiaries of upgrading exercise do not sell their units.

Legal challenge through court cases is another factor that adversely affects slum upgrading projects. The experience of Kenyan slum upgrading program (KENSUP) in Kibera is noteworthy. More than eighty people went to court. The court gave a perpetual injunction that the government should not begin works until the case was discharged. The plaintiffs claimed that the land in Kibera belonged to them. Hence the government had no rights to demolish the shacks. Verification of land ownership in Kibera turned out to be a problem because of multiple claimants over the same parcel of land. This scenario abounds in several parts of Africa.

3.6 Complexity of Evaluation Techniques

Initially slum upgrading was confined to the provision of physical infrastructure and service buildings. Later was added security of tenure, collective sense of ownership, and others. For reliability, upgrading of existing informal settlements should be based on an analysis of factual evidence such as geo graphic information system (GIS) and indicators of housing stress. Housing stress may be relatively easy to measure. This is not the case with social and economic indicators which are more complex to articulate and upgrade

Many current slum upgrading projects are based on the principle of combined interventions. This is usually referred to as integrated approach. These interventions usually include infrastructure works, provision of urban services, activities in education and health, and community development. This approach was adopted in the Favela-Bairro Programme in Brazil, and Programa Urbano Integral (Integral Urban Programme) in Medellin, Columbia.

A major challenge with the integral programme is the complexity of evaluation techniques. The range of expected outcomes that are directly or indirectly affected by the programme is very wide. The complementary relationship that may exist between different interventions within a programme make it very difficult to determine which of the components is more efficient at achieving the observed result.

3.7 Credibility of Participating NGOs

NGO's can be described as important stakeholders in slum upgrading initiatives. They promote the much needed activism. However experience has shown that some of them are not genuine. This category poses a challenge in slum improvement initiatives. According to Clark (1991), it is a great challenge to identify genuine NGO's due to prevailing lack of transparency and accountability. Similarly, Fisher (1998) remarks that many NGOs cannot deliver since they have been compromised by the ruling regimes. Therefore, effective slum upgrading should seek to engage NGOs that are credible, accountable, and transparent and that have unambiguous objectives.

3.8 Slum and Residents of Slum are not Homogenous

It is difficult to determine the specific purpose of slum upgrading in all contexts and according to different stakeholders. There are many diverse vested interests that exist in slums. Among them are the poor looking for a place to live, the criminal elements, and landlords who rent out shacks. The interest of these heterogeneous groups must be properly understood and brought into the planning process.

A primary challenge in slum upgrading is achieving some kind of coherence in the community in the face of differentiated interests. If not properly addressed, the situation could degenerate into social segregation and mutual distrust. UN-Habitat recommends that the best way to do this is through negotiated development which allows people to participate in negotiating their rights and understand that all the different interests will have to be addressed.

3.9 Socio-Cultural and Socio-Economic Issues

Gong and Van Soest (2002) point out that in addition to housing improvement, slum upgrade should also prioritize the socio-cultural and socio-economic issues that concern the improvement of the poor. A closely related assertion was made by Erdogen et al (1996). According to the researchers, sustenance of socio-cultural aspects should be a prerequisite for slum upgrading activities. Other authors like Leckie (1995) equally maintained that slum upgrading should integrate behavioural aspects of slum dwellers for sustainability. The case of segregation, gender discrimination of women and other marginalized groups is a challenge for slum upgrading initiative. Including women who were previously excluded from decision-making to participate in slum upgrading committees may make them feel withdrawn and intimidated to the extent that their voices may not be heard. As a result their presence may only have the impact of legitimising the output of the meeting but not fully representative of consensus and concerns of all.

The phenomenon of gentrification is another big challenge. A gentrified area is characterized by a displacement of a lower income group by a higher income one on account of change in neighbourhood character. Such displacements are associated with social dislocation and isolation.

A typical example was the former Maroko in Lagos which was demolished in 1990 after evicting the inhabitants. Out of 10,000 house owners displaced, only 2,000 were resettled. Part of the upgraded area that was formally known as Maroko is now known as Oniru Estate, where one plot of land costs over N200.0 million, and 3-Bedroom apartment is rented for more N9.0 million per annum. It is obvious that the initial inhabitants cannot afford to live in such area with rising rents and costs.

Slum upgrading is a good vision. But what happens is that the targeted dwellers do not live there themselves. Instead, they rent out to those who can afford the apartments, so that the income can assist them to educate their children and have some food. In order to stem this tide, a wholesome approach towards improving the quality of life is important in the aspect of capacity building and human development

3.10 Weak financial Mechanism

Availability and allocation of sufficient financial resources is a critical success factor in a city-wide slum upgrading process. Current upgrading activities are hampered by weak institutional and financial mechanisms as evidenced by the high dependence on external funding. The Kenyan experience reveals that such funding is donor-sourced, with little direct investment by the government. This poses a big risk because if for any reason the donor withdraws, the project will be stalled. Therefore this practice is not sustainable. In a particular case of Kisumu Town, Kenya, it was discovered that the finances were inadequate to undertake the upgrading strategy as had been envisaged.

3.11 Environmental Degradation

Slum upgrading faces the challenge of environmental degradation in the slums. Industrial effluent, uncollected garbage and flooding are among dangerous environmental exhibitions in the slums. Most of the existing slums were not planned with provision of access and services in mind. This often makes the installation of infrastructure both costly and environmentally disruptive.

Slums are also endangered due to the flammable building materials, illegal electricity connections and the use of charcoal for cooking in overcrowded homes. Therefore, effective upgrading should integrate rehabilitation and sustainability as core interventions in house improvement.

3.12 Maintenance

The current slum upgrading practices do not appear to have incorporated maintenance into the agenda. This tends to create difficulty in follow-up maintenance of upgraded infrastructure. The World Bank (2006) recommends that upgrading projects should provide incentives for community management and maintenance of upgraded slum infrastructure.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This paper explored the literature to understand the different perspectives of slum upgrading. Insitu slum upgrading and participatory slum upgrading were found to be most favoured by practitioners. The paper further examined these slum upgrading strategies and case studies carried out by previous researchers, to compare their effectiveness and identify their weaknesses and challenges. The key findings are: politicization of slum upgrading programme; misconceptions and negative perceptions; planning, design and institutional issues; land and tenure matters; complexity of evaluation techniques; credibility of participating NGOs; slums and residents of slums are not homogeneous; socio-cultural and socio-economic issues; weak financial mechanism; environmental degradation; and maintenance.

It is recommended that policy issues on slum intervention programmes should attempt to bundle these challenges and suggested solutions to fit into their specific socio-political and environmental context.

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