



SUSTAINABLE SLUM UPGRADING

Introduction

Slums are informal housing settlements commonly found in urban areas of developing countries which are characterised by poor shelter, low service provision and lacking in security of tenure. Slums are growing and new slums are forming. The international development community has been actively working to improve the living conditions of slum-dwellers and to reduce poverty via slum upgrading methods. There are various slum upgrading delivery models and approaches to tackle the urbanisation of poverty in developing countries. Many adaptive and proactive measures have been implemented through a variety of slum upgrading initiatives and partnerships; however there has been limited investigation of the longer term sustainability of such interventions.

Achieving sustainable upgrading

A research investigation of in-situ and rehabilitation slum upgrading infrastructure and housing projects in India and Kenya has found that there are many misconceptions around slums which can affect the sustainability of measures to upgrade informal settlements. The way that international development organisations and 'westerners' view slums is often very particular and not always resonant with the way that slum-dwellers view their living situation. Priorities for development are not always consistent across stakeholders and upgrading partners who normally come from varying cultural backgrounds and professional situations. Differing backgrounds and priorities for development across stakeholders have an impact on the sustainability of slum-upgrading delivery models. Research conducted across a range of slum upgrading options and contexts has enabled a number of interesting observations and considerations to emerge.



Figure 1: Slum housing in Pune, India.

Reliance on service provision

Outsiders of the slum may see physical deprivation, chaos and inefficiency, but from the inside slum-dwellers see their home, a situation they are able to cope with and in many cases that they are quite content with, if not happy. Many slum-dwellers actually make an efficient service out of what they manage to gain from the slum. For example, if they know they only get electricity for one hour a day they work their lives around it, similarly, if they know they can only get water from a communal tap-stand they adapt to the situation and know when the best time is to do their washing. The residents are flexible and learn to live with their situation. Their elasticity is high,

even if their service provision is low. Perhaps their elasticity is high *because* their service provision is low. If people have a higher service provision they will develop an increased reliance and so have lower elasticity, as is common in more developed communities. In the west where many international development professionals originate, the populations are less able to respond to such a situation and would consider it a crisis. Reliable service provision is expected to be provided in many western communities, but the priorities of developing communities are more basic. Where the next meal is coming from and educating future generations is often of more concern than service provision.

Choice

Many people choose to live in a slum. People with reasonable incomes reside in slums for a variety of reasons. Taking advantage of the informal economy and tax evasion in an informal settlement enables people to generate middle-class incomes that they might not have done otherwise. Slum-dwellers also benefit from low or no housing rent, subsidised services and charity. For some people, sitting outside formal government structures is advantageous. However, despite comfortable incomes, many slum-dwellers do not value middle-class lifestyles. In India in particular people are often less materialistic than in the west. Many believe in the notion of Karma or Samsara and reincarnation, and willingly accept the standard of living that god has given them in this life, holding the belief that if they do their best with their situation, their next life will be better. In Kenya, many see their current situation in Kibera (Nairobi's largest slum) as an interim stage and an advantageous opportunity allowing them to get work from the city with the plan that they will return to their villages to retire. For many, home is considered to be the village. Therefore life in Kibera is a good opportunity to make the most of, not the desperate situation that many outsiders see on the surface. People's priorities in the slums are not the same as those in the developed world. Therefore international development organisations should remain sensitive to the pragmatic advantages of being a slum-dweller. However, despite the positives of living in a slum, residents still have to struggle with a desperate daily life overcoming issues such as crime, abuse, prostitution, poor healthcare etc. Many people live hand to mouth and are exploited because of their situation.



Figure 2: Courtyard spaces aid social cohesion for new housing at Hadapsar, Pune, India.

Community cohesion

International development organisations should not impose the assumption that slum-dwellers always aspire to a particular lifestyle or physical living condition. Although materially they may appear to be living in poverty, spiritually they may in fact be very rich, something which is often overlooked by outsiders. One of the defining characteristics of a slum (as defined by international development organisations) is overcrowding. Research has found that slum-dwellers do not consider crowding a priority issue to be resolved (Cronin 2011, Hasan 2010). Community cohesion tends to be more important for residents in informal settlements. Such communities live together following a way of life that is often alien to those in the developed world. For example, in India generations reside together as joint families and the idea of putting an elderly relative in a care home or a newly married couple setting up a separate home together is considered strange. Westerners often live a more

isolated lifestyle where it is not unusual to have never met one's neighbours, something unheard of in informal settlements where communities support each other in a very positive way.

Appropriate building design

In case studies of upgrading in India and Kenya, tribal tensions, community hierarchy and domination emerged as causing tension among communities but overcrowding was not found to be a negative aspect of residing in a slum. Slum housing which is normally at ground level enables families to use the threshold and outside areas as social and living spaces which are highly valued by slum-dwelling people. This aspect is crucial for the cultures of these communities and is an example of how the built environment can have a powerful influence upon social cohesion, happiness and life generally. Appropriate housing design for slum-dwellers following these living cultures is therefore vital for the sustainability of a slum-upgrading development. Slum dwellers also appreciate flexible building designs which give the occupant more control and the option to make incremental additions and extensions as their family grows. Research has found that high-rise buildings and living at altitude is not a problem, but the internal layouts that are designed have detrimentally affected community cohesion.



Figure 3: High rise in-situ rehabilitation buildings at Nanapeth, Pune, India.

Security of tenure

Some individuals are held back from bettering their living situation and are forced to reside in a slum. Due to insecurity of tenure, lack of affordable housing and poor economic mobility, residents are either unwilling or unable to make investments in their home. A commitment to the settlement or housing is needed for residents to invest in their property themselves, but if they do not hold the title deeds to the land, they will always be reluctant to make such investments as they could be taken away from them at any moment. In many cases slum-dwellers accept this situation and the accompanying benefits that if they are illegal squatters they do not have to pay formal rents or taxes and the opportunities that the slum in the city offers e.g. for better employment and education opportunities. Residents often make a conscious choice to accept their housing situation but remain held back by insecure tenure.

Coordinated planning policy, governance and partnerships

Provision of affordable housing and basic services may be considered to be a government's responsibility, for which coordinated master-planning is needed. A piece-meal approach to developing slums via pilot and NGO projects does not support the wide-ranging, far-reaching and forward-thinking strategy which is needed for cities to develop sustainably and cater to growing populations. Only governments have the power to influence planning policy for their cities, but as research has shown, government projects do not always successfully engage with communities or implement their schemes as sensitively to communities as they could do. NGO's however work in a different way and are able to successfully communicate and empower communities to embrace slum-upgrading interventions better than governments. But, NGO projects ultimately undermine governments unless they have an impact upon institutional frameworks and are able to implement activities to influence governments for future projects. The alternative stakeholders have very different professional working styles which affect their capability to work coherently together. But governments can learn from NGOs and the parties would be best to operate alongside each other in a supportive manner rather than compete and undermine. Ideally, NGOs, governments, the private sector and donors would work together in a partnership approach to combine their skills and working styles. For example; donors with cross-cultural communication skills as well as funding, private companies with professionalism and a drive for efficiency, NGOs capable of gaining the trust and support of communities, and governments with the power to repeat and scale up projects. Ultimately, political will and supportive institutional frameworks are crucial for sustainable slum upgrading.

Ownership

The management of the operation and maintenance of upgraded infrastructure needs to be under the control of the recipient, be that the state or the community. An appropriately designed and implemented intervention that the recipient is able to maintain, and is motivated to maintain is an indicator of the sustainability of a project. This sense of ownership is crucial for the success of a physical intervention and has been demonstrated by communities which have been mobilised to be involved with the upgrading at every step of the implementation. Residents who contribute financially can aid the community's buy-in and develop a real sense of ownership. Upgrading needs to be made affordable to the community, but a successful sense of ownership can only be achieved with the release of title deeds and security of tenure to the community.

Livelihood generation

Enterprise development and employment opportunities are needed alongside slum upgrading activities for poverty reduction. Case studies of successful upgrading watsan infrastructure in Kibera have shown that a key component was the formation of management communities and jobs created for the facility managers. These jobs helped position the new facilities within the centre of the community and helped to gain the respect of the society and therefore value of the project. By valuing the project the community consider the facilities to be an asset to the community and are more likely to protect it for the future and operate, manage and maintain it as best they can for the good of themselves and future generations, thus supporting sustainability. Conversely, case studies of slum resettlement projects in India which lacked enterprise development components resulted in the community being forced to relocate away from their previous livelihoods due to the situation of available land for the rehabilitation. In this case, the engagement of an NGO to work with and support communities with their livelihoods would have been beneficial to better support income generating activities thus enabling communities to improve their economic mobility.



Figure 4: Job creation with watsan infrastructure upgrading in Kibera, Kenya.

Cultural differences

There are differences between communities in different situations which affects the sustainability of slum upgrading interventions in those contexts. For example, in one situation residents may be a strategic, hardworking and forward looking population with the hope and desire to better oneself and the situation of future generations. Whereas in another, the perceptions may differ in that there is less of an emphasis on personally bettering oneself and more of an expectation of support from others and particularly the government with less responsibility on the individual. It could be interpreted that the people's aspirations differ across cultures which impacts on their hopes and desires. Aspirations in life may be developed from an awareness of opportunities, access to information and education which people in these developing situations are often deprived of.

Advantages of slum-dwelling

The slum development discourse has been led by people who do not reside in slums and often international development professionals coming from a developed or 'westernised' point of view. Such people may consider the physical manifestation of slums as demeaning in some way of the human ambition. Some more wealthy people may be repelled and fearful of slums as in a sense the expression of where society needs to escape from. But research has shown that slum dwellers do not always consider the slum as a key feature of their lives, but rather their relationships, spirituality, creativity, hope, ambition and

their dreams. In places that are developed there tends to an obsession with cleanliness and order and slums fly in the face of both, although there is a resilience to slums that is probably far greater than is found in more ordered and controlled societies. Slum dwellers know how to live with intermittent services, unhygienic conditions, inadequate income and so on in a way that more structured societies could not.

Considerations for practitioners

The views of the various stakeholders involved in slum upgrading are not always consistent, no matter whether they are local or outsiders. Priorities differ, and so this has a significant impact on how upgrading should be delivered to satisfy the different parties' needs. The route to sustainability is not always clear-cut but there are common characteristics across slum upgrading cases. Here are some recommendations that slum upgrading practitioners should consider when aspiring for sustainability in their work;

Do not impose your values

- Don't assume that what is being delivered is what the slum-dweller wants. Don't assume that the slum-dweller wants help to develop. According to your expectations you may feel it is needed, but it may not be considered a priority to the slum-dweller. Be culturally sensitive.

Be sensitive to the pragmatic advantages of slum-dwelling

- Residing in a slum may have benefits such as; tax evasion, free healthcare, affordable lifestyle, central location. If standards were higher, the cost of living may be unaffordable to the slum-dweller, therefore the slum may offer an advantageous opportunity. Many people reside in slums out of choice.

Consider appropriate design

- High density housing may be preferred by the slum-dweller; overcrowding may not be an issue and can aid cohesion in low-income communities. Consider the impact of building design upon community cohesion which has been shown to be a priority for slum-dwellers.
- Flexible building designs which enable the inhabitant to make incremental additions, or with the option to extend are often preferred by slum-dwellers.

Security of tenure

- A commitment to the settlement and/or security of tenure is needed for residents' sense of ownership, to be incentivised to make investments themselves, and to maintain and care for the assets into the future.
- Do not assume slum dwellers want to own their home or prioritise housing in their lives. Slum-dwellers may not care about ownership and security of tenure preferring to rent. There are advantages to renting which may suit residents best.

Governance

- Coordinated master planning is needed by governments for their cities. Political will and supportive institutional frameworks are crucial.
- NGOs should not undermine government, but share their skills to work together with governments.
- Measures are needed to prevent the formation of new slums. The provision of affordable housing and related infrastructure for a growing population is vital.

Scaleable

- One-off pilot projects which cannot be reproduced, scaled up or do not positively affect housing and planning policy are unsustainable.

Maintainable and Operational

- Management of operation and maintenance needs to be under recipient control. Upgrading should be affordable to maintain, with parts and skills available. Recipients need to be motivated to want to maintain the upgrading.

Affordable

- Costs should be appropriately affordable to the context in order for upgrading to be scaled up, repeated and maintainable. Financial contribution towards housing aids sense of ownership and value of the assets.

Livelihood generation

- Simultaneous enterprise development and job creation is needed alongside upgrading for poverty reduction and to enforce asset creation, sense of value of the upgrading and the community's incentive to maintain it for the future.

This Brief is based on research which has benefitted from a methodology with ground level surveys that allowed stakeholders to express what they really felt rather than answer questions that the researcher had predetermined the priority of. The rigorous, academic yet personal nature

of this research methodology has enabled more sensitive data to be gathered which has highlighted the common misconceptions around slums and slum upgrading intervention. For sustainability, any slum upgrading activity must be sensitive to the situation of an individual community and culture, and not assume that the residents are unhappy living in desperate poverty, as it has been shown, many choose to reside in a slum. Slums may be dirty, poorly serviced and overcrowded but are also places of great human energy, community spirit, kindness, hard-working, creative and happy places that many consider home.

References & Further Information

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Videos:

The Voice of Kibera: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MRI7nh6KjDQ>

Developer led slum upgrading - Nana Peth, Pune: <http://vimeo.com/14138318>

Community led slum upgrading - Hadapsar, Pune: <http://vimeo.com/14136786>

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