

Urban Poverty Alleviation and Neighbourhood Upgrading:
the international agendas versus a Sub-Saharan African context.¹

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ABSTRACT

This paper is concerned with the urbanization pattern found in Sub-Saharan African cities. It pinpoints the basic characteristics and the effect of such process, using as a background the city of Bissau, capital of Guinea-Bissau. It intends to show the discrepancy between the international agendas for development cooperation and the problems faced at the grassroots level. It argues in favour of an integrated approach that gives a response to the physical dimensions of urban poverty. Some practical examples and arguments are taken from the Dutch sponsored neighbourhood upgrading project of Bissau.

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INTRODUCTION

Besides the effects caused by the historical changes that took place in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the 1990s started with a different perspective for the developing countries. The new agendas for development cooperation formulated by international donor organizations finally highlight the importance of the urban sector in the overall development process. This can be illustrated by the policy documents issued by the World Bank, the United Nations agencies and the Dutch government (MDC, 1990;1991; UNDP, 1991; UN, 1991; WB,1991). In different ways, most documents recognize the inefficiency of the past policy efforts, programmes and projects that intended to give a response to urban problems, and at the same time they reveal a certain degree of "mea culpa" for the increase of urban poverty.

Former efforts made by national governments were fully sponsored by donor organizations but did not accomplish the essential institutional reforms, revealing to a certain extent a narrow and project based perspective. A careful analysis of these documents shows that all efforts should now be shifted to a city wide perspective, assuming a close linkage between the urban sector and macro economic development. There is now a consensus that cities play a very important role in the process of economic development, contributing significantly for the growth of the GNP of many countries and that the economy of agglomeration offers a number of advantages. Though, there is a strong preoccupation for the consequences brought by the alarming rates of urbanization and the dramatic changes occurring in several cities of the Developing World. There is an unanimous call for better city management in order to enable the best and most efficient performance of the different actors operating in the urban scenario, specially the private sector. The state must withdraw itself from the role of provider and act as an enabler in urban development processes, opening spaces for privatization and deregulation. Cities must be able to take care of themselves and should look for sustainable forms of development without neglecting the environmental impacts of urbanization. Local authorities must decentralize the planning process and achieve a financial autonomy through the increase of municipal revenues and tax collection. New policies must be introduced as part of comprehensive institutional reform in order to accomplish the productivity of the urban environment and alleviate urban poverty. Shifts in policy making are expected to generate development strategies that can meet the real needs of the most needed groups in terms of housing, infrastructure, employment, health and education. Thus, the physical, economic and social aspects of poverty will be tackled through structural reforms and city wide policy approaches, through labour intensive development strategies, the increase of labour productivity and through the increase of social sector expenditure.

In theory, the shifts that are advocated by the new agendas can be considered as coherent proposals but in practice, when it is confronted with the situations typically found in the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, they become or unrealistic or difficult to be operationalized.

The paradox is that the same local government authority, whose task is to undertake actions and resolve the constraints that hinders urban development, is in itself a part of the problem and one of the main obstacles for the accomplishment of an acceptable urban management process. It suffers from two chronic deficiencies: the lack of a local capacity and the scarcity of financial resources. The situation becomes even more complex because outdated or inappropriate legislations help to perpetuate a stagnated institutional framework.

Besides that, the new guidelines practically disregard the local situations and the agenda of priorities set at the grassroots by the majority of the population who live in informal settlements.

This paper intends to confront the basic recommendations of the international agendas with a local context found in Sub-Saharan Africa in an implicit and explicit way. It tries to characterize the profile

of a Sub-Saharan African city, its process of urbanization and its main problems using as a background the city of Bissau, capital of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau. The city presents some indicators and phenomena which are found, in a lesser or higher degree, in other urban centres of the region. The case of Bissau serves to illustrate the difficulties to operationalize a development process that is based on the guidelines of the new agendas of development cooperation. The paper raises some questions and presents the way through which the problem of urban poverty was tackled within the scope of the Dutch funded neighbourhood upgrading project of Bissau.

The author is aware that generalizations are dangerous and can easily lead to superficiality. Above all, it tends to ignore the peculiarities of each country and people, their specific social, economic and political contexts and the local diversities.

THE DEFINITION OF URBAN POVERTY

The new international agendas advocate programmes and projects that are aimed at urban poverty alleviation. In fact, it is a key development concern for the 90's. However, before actions and plans are implemented it is necessary that the fundamental essence of poverty is understood. The word poverty is originated from the latin word "paupertas", translated as restricted means. Poverty is the condition of being without adequate food, money, resources, etc. Misery, an extreme form of poverty, is a word originated from the latin word "miseria" that means intensive unhappiness, discomfort or suffering, disgrace, a deplorable state of being (Acioly, 1992).

Poverty is measured in different ways and its assessment depends on who measures it, how it is measured and where the measurement takes place. The World Bank defines the poverty line an annual income below US\$370.00 but this seems to be insufficient to describe a condition of being poor because it does not take into consideration cultural differences, local economic conditions and different eating habits among the various countries and regions. The ECLA defines a poverty line a monthly income below double the value of the monthly basic subsistence basket. This definition seems to be more adequate because it defines a minimum subsistence line and allows the incorporation of local diversities and peculiarities in terms of culture, economy, climate, eating habits, etc. Though, both parameters are strongly concerned with the economic facet of poverty.

Poverty manifests itself in different ways and becomes undeniable in the urban centres of the developing countries, where one can observe that great sections of the urban fabric are deprived from minimum living standards and basic commodities. The population of these localities have no access to the goods and benefits produced through urban development. They live under segregative conditions social, spatial, political and economically speaking whilst others live in sections of the city where high standards and public services of top quality do exist. This sharp contrast in living standards and the social and spatial segregation are some of the characteristics of the cities of the developing countries. This is mostly caused by the development models undertaken by most governments in the Developing World whose effects become sharply visible in the cities. The fact is that only a certain parcel of the population has profited from development and economic growth, those who fortunately detained the production and capital means and had directly or indirectly participated in the decision making process. Decisions taken at policy and planning levels have often disregarded the interests and the real needs of the urban poor, usually giving the privilege to an elite and minority group who have the capacity and ability to exercise different sorts of pressure. The belief that the planning process is neutral and should serve the interests of the whole population has only lead to the perpetuation of a technocratic planning model.

This scenario reveals the different facets of the urban poor. It projects the various dimensions of poverty on the urban structure of cities. A physical dimension refers to a constrained and limited

accessibility to basic urban commodities such as infrastructure, housing, primary household goods, etc.

The economic dimension implies a disadvantage position in the job market, an unequal chance to employment and to opportunities for income generation. It reveals situations of unemployment, marginality, underemployment, scarcity of financial resources and low power of purchase of a large part of the population, far below the minimum required for the subsistence of a household. A social dimension shows that not everyone in society can accomplish the social benefits produced through development and reveals that there is limited access to education, health and social services. But poverty has an international dimension as well. On one hand, the increase of foreign debts of the Developing countries reinforced their economic and political dependency to the Developed World. On the other hand, the demands imposed by the debts and the high interest rates forced most governments to pursue capital intensive and export oriented policies in order to generate the needed financial resources to pay their commitments. As a consequence, vital social sectors were placed in a very secondary position in the agenda of the governments.

Structural and economic adjustment programmes starts to prevail in relation to human development policies. In that way, the developing countries can continue to pay the interests of their debts and become eligible to apply for new loans. This attitude disregards the adverse effects among the population, specially on the urban poor. Instead of redistribute wealth, these austerity programmes hit the poor very hard by putting more pressure on their weak earnings, cutting subsidies of basic consumption goods and increasing the disparities between incomes. Besides that, the control over means of production and technology creates an international dependency circle which is expressed in new forms of cultural, technological and economic colonialism. That contributes to keep unchanged the different dimensions of poverty and consolidates stratified societies in the Developing countries, thus perpetuating urban poverty.

BISSAU AS A MIRROR OF A SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN CITY

Bissau was founded in 1687 by the Portuguese who kept Guinea-Bissau as a colony for 528 years. Independence occurred in 1974, as the PAIGC-African Party of Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde defeated the Portuguese army in a war that consumed 15 years. The city was the capital and most important centre during colonial period and became the national capital of independent Guinea-Bissau. Actually, 20 % of the total population of the country lives in the capital city, which represents almost two thirds of the total urban population of the country.

In the beginning of this century, the perimeter of the city was relatively small, practically limited by its core, a fortification located close to the port and facing the estuary of the river Geba. The first expansion plan was formulated in 1948 and defined a physical structure based on a grid of geometric blocks and orthogonal roads, what is known today as the colonial core.

In the period 1948-1960, the population of the city grew at annual rates close to 10 % but in the subsequent period, the annual growth rate was increased as the guerrilla warfare intensified in the rural areas. The war displaced around 150,000 people out of their home places. Many of those who run away from the areas of intense combats migrated to Bissau and that earmarks the start of a process of rapid urban growth. An aerial photography taken in 1973, a year before independence, reveals that the colonial core was already surrounded by 13 african type of neighbourhoods. These neighbourhoods were basically formed by a process of informal urbanization which was tolerated by the Portuguese colonial administration.

The informal urbanization is responsible for the major growth of Bissau. Inventories carried out in the dawn of the 80's show that the allocation of urban plots made by the local authority represents just a very small percentage of the requests of the population. The building permits are decreasing every

year while the housing stock has been continuously growing. The permits issued by the Municipality of Bissau in the period 1988-90, shows that they represent no more than 20 % of the total houses that had to be built in order to provide accommodations for the growing population. (Acioly, 1992;1993). It is estimated that almost 80 % of the population of the city is actually living in informal settlements, locally known as "bairros" or popular neighbourhoods.

That is a typical phenomenon of Sub-Saharan Africa. 75 % of the population Dar-es-Salaam and 59 % of Ouagadogo are living in informal settlements (UNDP, 1990). In 1968, only 5 % of the population of Bamako was living in informal settlements, but in 1983, more than one third of the inhabitants was living in these settlements. During the late eighties, illegal occupation was responding for half of the urban growth of the city (NWR, 1987). In 1978, 38 % of the housing stock of Nairobi was situated in illegal settlements and in Lusaka, there is actually more than 250,000 people living in informal settlements.

In Bissau, this urbanization pattern creates a number of neighbourhoods that have a series of features in common:

- a. They are deprived from the most essential infrastructure. Roads are not defined and are often unpaved accesses. Public electricity does not exist and individual connections to the network is only achieved by a small percentage of the inhabitants. Water supply is usually through shallow wells that are mostly polluted by the traditional pit latrines. Both facilities are usually shared by more than one house. The pit latrine is the only form of sanitation facility found by a great majority of the inhabitants. There are some public water standposts but insufficient to supply the existing demand for potable water.
- b. The houses are mostly built with adobe blocks or compacted mud walls and can reach a covered area equal to 180 m² and even larger. They follow the traditional design, a rectangular form subdivided in four or six rooms, surrounded by a veranda covered by large roof overhangs. The roof is four sided and is usually a thatched roof or it is covered by corrugated metal sheets. The veranda protects the adobe walls from the rain and is the space where cooking usually occurs. The residents pay a yearly land occupation tax of US\$ 2.50 to the Municipality, referred to the ground area where the houses stand. Land tenure is based on customary or traditional laws, except when the plot has been demarcated and regularized by a property title issued by the Municipality.
- c. The population density is very high. It is usually above 200 inhab./ha and the houses are often overcrowded. It is common to find a household occupying 2 rooms of 16 m². In the neighbourhood of Reino-Gambeafada, there is an average of 15.2 inhabitants per house, a density of 269 inhab/ha and a housing density of 18.5 houses/ha (for location, see the map in the annexo). In the neighbourhoods of Mindará and Belém, the average of inhabitants per house is above 14 and in Cupilom de Cima, it goes up to 16 and even 22 in the southern part of the settlement (Acioly, 1992;1993). This means that the cooking spaces, the washing and hygiene spaces and leisure areas are shared by more than two household. Overcrowding is a phenomenon of Sub-Saharan African urban centres mainly because of the low performance of the housing sector and a variety of constraints to have access to land, building materials and credit. In Accra, for example, 70 % of the families was living in one room in the beginning of the 80s.
- d. Renting and subletting rooms is a very popular practice. In Reino-Gambeafada, 69 % of the housing stock is partially or totally rented occupied from which 16 % are houses with absent owners. In Mindará, there is a very similar figure, where almost half of the housing stock is

partly or totally rented occupied, from which 17 % refers to absent owners. In Cupilom de Cima, rented occupation reached 23 % in 1986 and the presence of room renters was registered in 28 % of the stock.

- e. The majority of the neighbourhoods has no official urban plan. The spatial configuration of the settlements recalls tribal layouts and present several features found in the traditional rural settlements. 23 and 38 clan compounds were found respectively in Reino-Gambeafada and Cupilom de Cima, two centrally located neighbourhoods. These compounds are usually formed by two or more houses, built with a certain spatial relationship with one another and belonging to a single African family. Thus, an extended household that includes the father, wives, sons and daughters, their families, and even a third generation. A compound formed by 4 houses in Cupilom de Cima had almost 100 occupants belonging to one family group.
- f. The economy of these neighbourhoods is basically informal and is characterized by the existence of small scale enterprises that operates with a strong subsistence character. Tailors, vegetable and fruit shops, repair workshops, carpentry and furniture making, civil construction services, arts & crafts, small commerce, bars and restaurants are the typical activities found there. An inventory that covered 605 enterprises operating in the city reveal that 70 % of them was located in these neighbourhoods (Delgado,1990). They presented a very low capitalization, two thirds were operating with a capital below US\$ 1,700. They are small businesses that use the savings of the owners as source of capital; they lack advanced technologies and commonly make use of rudimentary means, have a low capacity of management and the labour is usually provided by the family circle and at low wages. The profile of the neighbourhood, in relation to the business sector, practically reflects the city profile. 71 % of all enterprises with less than 10 employees that exist in the country are situated in Bissau (Tablada, 1990).
- g. Considering that 70 % of the families living in Bissau had a monthly expenditure below the minimum necessary to cover their basic needs (EIU, 1992), it is possible to affirm that the population of these localities is very poor. Assessing wages and earnings is a very difficult task because the inhabitants simply refuse to reply to any inquiry referred to their income. It is practically a taboo. Almost 50 % of the inhabitants of Mindará was earning a family income that was less than US\$ 76 in 1984, and in Cupilom de Cima, the average family income was registered to be US\$ 67 in 1986 (Acioly, 1993). Urban poverty is not only a Guinean phenomenon but is an alarming factor in Africa. Although there is only 11.2 % of the world's urban population living in Africa, 41.6 % of its urban citizens is living under the poverty line (ADB, 1991).

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITY

To cope with and to give an effective response to this urbanization phenomenon, the Municipality of Bissau counts only with the good will of its personnel and the eventual support from foreign organizations. The institution lacks policy and managerial instruments, and it is not well equipped in terms of material and human resources to manage a city of 200 thousand inhabitants. Above all, it is progressively decreasing its financial stability due to an alarming and drastic decline in revenue collection. An analysis of the municipal budgets from 1987 to 1991, reveals that there is a decline in most of its important sources of revenues like fines and penalties, building permits, land occupation taxes, licences for advertisement in public spaces, solid waste collection tax. Even the amount transferred from the central government and originated from the national reconstruction tax is decreasing. Only the exploitation of the markets, the financial gains from the slaughterhouse and the payment of the tax that allows the street vendors to operate in the city are showing an increase during

this period. Considering this decline in revenue collection and taking into account that the overhead costs already consumes more than 60% of the budget, it becomes obvious that the municipality has very little left to invest in the city, to maintain public spaces, to improve the capacity of its services and to pay a better wage to its personnel.

The limitation of the municipality in performing its task as a local authority is worsened by the fact that it has been incapable to formulate urban policies, to develop programmes and to implement projects that could respond to the needs of the population and alleviate the conditions found in the popular neighbourhoods. The civil servant capacity is very low and is paid at extremely low wages. What makes the situation even more critical is that most of the public administrative procedures and the existing building and urban legislation are inherited from the colonial period and totally inadequate for the actual conditions of the city.

The inadequacy of the supply, management and maintenance of basic infrastructure services, mainly electricity and water, should be added to this chaotic institutional scenario. A public agency was created to take over this task from the municipality after independence but it has been unable to organize it at a minimum level. A change in the urban development pattern of Bissau has to start at first with a structural administrative reform in the whole municipal apparatus. And that must include the establishment of an institutional framework where roles and responsibilities of local and central agencies would be clearly defined, especially when one looks at the centralization that occurred after independence. This scenario does not contribute to the process of housing production. On the contrary, it stimulates the search for other alternatives which fall out of the official circuit. Above all, it hinders the overall economic development of the country, considering the importance and the role of the capital city.

STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PROGRAMMES-SAP

The implementation of SAP is another aspect that strikes when one analyses the development of Sub-Saharan African countries. In 1989, 35 countries already had adopted similar programs of structural adjustments (Sandbrook, 1991:95). In 1986, Guinea-Bissau embarked in a middle term structural adjustment program under the auspices of the IMF and the World Bank. The SAP implies the devaluation of the Guinean Peso, the establishment of a process of privatization, a new administrative structure to reinforce economic planning, austerity in budgeting, the reduction of production of current currency and the withdrawal of subsidies to the consumer's prices.

A series of fiscal and monetary policies were implemented in order (1) to accomplish a sustainable economic development, (2) to stabilize the finances of the State and (3) to diminish the rate of inflation. The apparatus of the State had to shrink which implied a severe control over salaries and the dismissal of public servants at a large scale. The commerce, formerly in the hands of the State, was liberalized and many import restrictions were abolished. The most significant feature of the SAP in Guinea-Bissau is the decrease of the dominant role of the State in trading & commerce and the process of privatization. Specially if one considers that the country has been ruled by a one party system and a centrally planned economy that resembled the regimes in fashion in Eastern European countries.

Only a few Sub-Saharan African countries were capable to achieve the targeted growth rates although some were capable to accomplish economic growth. Since the majority of the countries of the region was facing negative rates of growth, any alteration resulted from adjustment measures generated the phenomenon of growth. It is worth mentioning that the region has had the worst economic performance among all the others of the planet. The emphasis given to export policies, as an instrument to capture resources in hard currencies and to pay the interests of their loans assumed with the World Bank and IMF, caused an abrupt increase of foreign debt payments. Between 1981 and

1986, the payments of the foreign debt of Africa tripled, from US\$4 billions to US\$11,7 billions (Hamdi, 1989) but in 1993 the debt of Sub-Saharan Africa reached US\$183 billions while in 1982, the debt was around US\$72.48 billions (Mistry, 1991).

In Guinea-Bissau, the SAP had a positive effect in the increment of the GNP, in the export of agricultural products and the increase of domestic consumption. The public deficit was decreased but a deterioration of the living and economic conditions among the urban population was verified, specially among the most vulnerable groups. There is an increase of unemployment and an explosive growth of the informal market where a number of activities of income generation could be identified. The informal sector became the natural outlet of a significant parcel of the urban population.

The difficulties inherent or generated from the enforcement of measures prescribed by the SAP seems to be felt in other countries of the Sub-Saharan Africa, and that is precisely the paradox. The structural adjustment implies that there is a local capacity to formulate and implement complex policies related to pricing, commerce, banking, finance, foreign investments. The State is originally conceived as part of the problem of economic stagnation but must contribute to the solution of that (Sandbrook, 1992:96).

INFORMALIZATION

Another fact which is common in the region is the informalization of the economy vis-a-vis to the process of urbanization. Both are closely linked with the economic adjustment. The informal sector represents another paradox and is actually a polemic in the international debate. On one hand, the informal sector absorbs more than 50 % of the total economic activity in certain countries, responding for more than 50 % of the total employment. On the other hand, the informal sector contributes very little to the local authorities' revenues. The fiscal policies of the local government authorities cannot extract from informal entrepreneurs the revenues in terms of taxation as it does from the formal sector. The simple support to the informal sector, as advocated by many international agendas, does not address the issue correctly. The informal enterprises cannot maximize their productive capacity because of its informality and in a certain degree due to its illegality. They suffer from a tremendous handicap due to the operational constraints they have to face like the lack of recognition, the lack of access to official credits and loans, the improvised form of establishment, the lack of operational capital, the lack of access to publicity of its products and services, their fear for penalties, etc. Should the informal businesses have their way cleared out for a formalization of their activity, so that they can directly contribute to the process of urban development, or should they be kept marginal as they are and receive the necessary support provided that they offer a good opportunity for employment and income generation for the urban poor? Is that a mechanism of poverty alleviation ?

How can the problem of urban poverty be tackled within this complex development context at the macro and micro levels ? What dimensions and which aspects of poverty should be primarily addressed by policy and programmes ?

URBAN POVERTY, THE GRASSROOTS AND THE INTERNATIONAL AGENDAS

The impact of poverty and its relationship with the poor health conditions of the inhabitants in a particular locality can be explained as the effect of a lack of financial resources to obtain a minimum subsistence basket, the incapability to pay for health care and/or even as the result of the absence of a doctor and primary health care facilities. Illiteracy and low level of education among the inhabitants contributes for a poor health condition and can be explained as the result of a lack of classrooms and teachers or the lack of money to cope with the costs of primary education. If this logic is true, then the employment conditions should be primarily satisfied as a guarantee of access to financial resources provided that a school and a health centre will be available for the inhabitants of that urban locality in question. The private sector is unlikely to be the one to provide these basic commodities for the urban poor. Then governments are expected to assume their utmost responsibilities and guarantee the social and economic welfare of the population. If they don't, then the inhabitants should take actions through their community based organizations in order to shift policy and political decisions towards their needs. In this way they will achieve a redistribution of wealth through their own actions. This implies a capacity of organization and community mobilization that will consequently lead to a confrontation with the existing balance of power, which will certainly be dealt with in a political arena. The question is whether the inhabitants are capable to organize themselves and whether governments are willing to tolerate those actions? Considering that the planning process is far from being neutral, should one put emphasis to the grassroots and stimulate community organization in order to shift the decision making process at the political level? Will national governments tolerate this type of approach coming from an international organization and will they be prepared to cope with the political and economic outcome?

These are some of the dilemmas that the international agendas have not been able to respond. So far, the policies' guidelines have not been translated into effective project actions. The definition of priorities have been defined unilaterally, at the office desk of policy makers of donor countries, based on a certain vision of development and making use of arguments that are sustained by very sophisticated statistical cross tabulations.

It is clear that the employment sector gains more and more importance. The ever increasing labour force concentrated in the cities should receive a great attention due to the risks of political turmoil caused by unemployment and economic stagnation. A high rate of employment represents the engagement of the economically active population in the overall process of development. It represents opportunities for improving the social welfare and better survival possibilities. But both the provision of adequate housing and infrastructure are essential prerequisite for the reproduction of the labour force thus a condition for economic development. The secondary importance of the housing sector in the policy documents disregards the fact that the housing and construction sectors play an important role in the economic development process, providing jobs and contributing significantly to the GNP of many countries. To provide adequate employment but not providing means to change the precarious and deprived living conditions of the urban poor will lead to the perpetuation of urban poverty. Because if we agree that urban poverty has different facets and dimensions, the emphasis on employment will only give a response to the economic dimensions of poverty.

When the needs and priorities set by the urban poor are confronted to the guidelines and priorities defined by development cooperation agencies, it is possible to see the disparities in visions and interpretation of the reality. In Bissau, the poor living in some neighbourhoods, where the Netherlands is supporting an urban project, were able to formulate their priorities which clashed against the priorities established by the Dutch policy for development cooperation.

Considering the characteristics of the popular neighbourhoods of Bissau, it is not difficult to foresee

what priorities the inhabitants would list. The critical conditions of the physical infrastructure e.g. lack of drainage and heavy erosion problems, lack of roads and access, inadequate water and electricity supply, dilapidated housing stock, etc. will certainly be placed in their list of priorities. In the neighbourhood of Cupilom de Cima, the inhabitants defined six items which were considered as essential to improve their living conditions, in order of priority as follows: (1) building of a house, (2) employment, (3) improvement of the house, (4) the extension of the house, (5) to study abroad, (6) to buy or repair a car. The last two priorities are seen as two opportunities to gain access to financial resources, through a scholarship and through the operation of a taxi. They also defined a list of priorities to improve their neighbourhood: (1) the improvement of the house, (2) the building of a health centre, (3) the building of public water taps, (4) the pavement of roads, (5) electricity and (6) a school (Mengers, 1986).

Although the inhabitants' choices reflect an integrated view of development problems, it is interesting to see that the housing component is placed as a top priority. Nothing strange considering the state of decay of the housing stock, the high costs of building components which are mostly imported, like cement and corrugated sheets, and the lack of a credit system to stimulate housing production in the popular sector.

In the neighbourhood of Reino-Gambeafada, the inhabitants defined an order of priorities: (1) water supply, (2) housing, (3) health centre, (4) electricity, (5) school, (6) drainage and (7) solid waste collection (Acioly, 1991). Taking into account that there was only one water supply standpost for a population of 7,000 inhabitants, it is not a surprise to see their first priority. The problems of access receives no priority and that is really a surprise considering the lack of accessibility to the inner spaces of the neighbourhood. Perhaps it is because of the low rate of car ownership among the inhabitants. Their priorities are mostly related to the physical and social dimensions of poverty and not at all referred to its economic aspects like employment, income generation, access to financial resources, etc.

The translation of these priorities into feasible project actions is the task of policy makers and project designers but the formulation of an action plan must be linked with an integrated view of the problem, the analysis of the physical and environmental conditions of the settlement as a whole, the level of organization of the inhabitants, their will to cooperate and to participate in upgrading works, the cost benefit analysis of project options, the human and financial resources available, etc.

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD UPGRADING PROJECT OF BISSAU-PMBB

To give a response to the problems of the neighbourhoods of Bissau, a project was formulated and has been implemented since 1986, counting with the financial support of the Dutch bilateral organization-DGIS and with the technical assistance of the Dutch Development Organization-SNV. The PMBB was placed under the tutorship of the Minister of Public Works and later placed under the institutional umbrella of the Municipality of Bissau. The neighbourhoods of Mindará, Belém and Cupilom de Cima were selected as the first target neighbourhoods, defining a population of 25,000 inhabitants (for location, see map in the annexo).

At first, the PMBB gave priority to solve the problems of inadequate infrastructure provision, mainly water supply, drainage and roads. Slowly, after 1989, it switched to a more integrated project approach that tries to resolve problems related to physical planning, housing, sanitation, basic infrastructure and community involvement. The PMBB was mainly concerned with the physical dimension of urban poverty. The lack of a minimum habitat condition was seen as a factor that hinders any further development at the neighbourhood level. Without solving or alleviating the problems of inadequate water supply, accessibility and the definition of private and public domains, it would be very difficult to obtain a positive impact in the living conditions of the inhabitants.

The infrastructure works were implemented without a clear understanding by the local population and the Municipality of Bissau for cost recovery and payment of taxes. It was more important to demonstrate the technical feasibility of an upgrading approach due to the pioneer character of the project. Therefore the emphasis was put on training the labour force and to organize an implementation process. Working brigades were organized and it was given the opportunity for employment to local residents.

The population was first involved through the existing local organizations. As common in political systems ruled by one party, every neighbourhood had its party committee, the only channel of participation and community mobilization. Besides that, there were the local branches of the Youth organization-JAAC and the Women's organization-UDEMU, all under the control of the party-PAIGC. The participation of the layman was rather restricted when the PMBB started but slowly it was possible to introduce a broader participatory scheme. Around the area of influence of the water supply standposts, the residents of a group of 40-50 houses were organized in commissions who had to elect the care taker and to decide the amount that every house should pay for the maintenance and operation of the system. The same care taker would mobilize the residents and users of his water standpost to maintain the drainage gutters passing through their zone.

The problem of accumulation of trash and the system of solid waste collection was also discussed through these meetings and small seminars. But to have a long term effect and to change the vicious behaviour of the population, it was necessary to tackle the issue at the primary school level. A campaign was launched and a series of presentations were organized per classes. Through puppet theatre shows and visual presentations, the children were exposed to the issue of neighbourhood upgrading, its meaning and scope and its obstacles. They were stimulated to write monographs and make drawings describing how they see the process of neighbourhood improvement.

The participation of the residents only gained a substantial response when an assisted self-help housing programme was launched in Cupilom de Cima, where the PMBB could stimulate the establishment of a broad neighbourhood council (Acioly, 1992;1993). Although the council was not a strong organization, it allowed the existing mass organizations controlled by the PAIGC, the party branch and the traditional leaders to share a decision making process. The activities around the programme showed that housing had a catalytic role when compared to infrastructure works. Perhaps because of the immediate perception of the inhabitants for the real and direct benefits brought by a new and improved house. Through the building of a total of 50 houses during three consecutive dry seasons (89-91), the PMBB was possible to engage the inhabitants in the process of neighbourhood upgrading. Voluntary and compulsory demolitions and reconstructions of houses could partly materialize the proposed settlement layout of Cupilom de Cima, where individual plots were demarcated. In this neighbourhood, the PMBB intended to institutionalize the settlement layout through the definition of individual properties and use it as an instrument to launch simultaneously a land taxation system and a neighbourhood improvement taxation programme.

At the same time, it provided the PMBB with a chance to test a housing finance scheme. The inhabitants would make a down payment equal to US\$300, from which one third was paid at the moment that the contract was signed, and the rest when the structure of the roof would be ready. The corrugated sheets could only be delivered after the second payment was done. Both the inhabitant and the PMBB had roles and shared responsibilities in the building process. Most of the building components that depended on imported materials like cement and corrugated sheets was the PMBB's task, basically the foundation works and the placement of the corrugated sheets. The rest was the inhabitants' responsibilities e.g. adobe blocks, the walls, the acquisition of the local wood, the roof structure and compacting of the floor areas.

The final cost of the houses was US\$3,200 and would be recovered in a period of five years through the lease of a minimum of two rooms (out of six) to the PMBB. The PMBB would be free to rent them to whoever is looking for a house and the cost recovery process should aim at the establishment of a revolving housing improvement fund.

These are just some of the attempts made by the PMBB to create a sustainable process of neighbourhood upgrading that would lead to the consolidation of a policy and a planning unit within the institutional framework of the municipality. The approach was to consolidate a project approach and a working method, and to look for other perspectives in terms of institutionalization, cost recovery, revolving fund and stronger community participation at the different stages of the project cycle. The primary concern of the PMBB was to tackle the physical dimension of urban poverty, the only way to ameliorate the living conditions of the inhabitants of the popular neighbourhoods.

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AND CHANGES AT THE PROJECT LEVEL

When the guidelines of the new policy of development cooperation (MDC, 1990;1991) was introduced during the transition from the first (87-91) to the second phase (92-96) of the PMBB, a series of critical points were raised. The most important critique was the emphasis given to the delivery of "heavy" infrastructure works, its failure to set up a cost recovery mechanism at neighbourhood level and the weak institutional building. The disregard of the guidelines given by the Dutch policy was seen as fundamental problem. The new policy defines seven areas of intervention to which funds should be allocated like rural development, urban development, education, health, culture, women and the public and private sectors. Rural poverty continues to occupy a relevant position in the budget but four core areas of interest are identified in terms of programmes to be supported: environment & development, urban poverty alleviation, research & technology and women & development. The participation of the residents in the solution of their problems and the involvement of NGOs in local development problems, the access to land and urban commodities are seen as relevant issues but employment and income generation are seen as a key to alleviate poverty. Activities based on labour intensive techniques, the establishment and support to small scale private enterprises and to the informal sector must be looked at as a path to reduce urban poverty. It is worth noting that the gender issue in development problems gains a relevant position in the policy paper as well.

For the PMBB, it meant a shift in its approach and its character and a change in the nature of its works and its facet. Infrastructure works become secondary and should be privatized or implemented by small private enterprises. This should be particularly stimulated as a job creation policy. More emphasis should be given to community development and organization, institutionalization and capacity building. The most interesting outcome is the transformation of the PMBB into a semi-independent municipal agency for urbanization and regularization-AMUR. I will levy and collect land and property taxes plus infrastructure improvement taxes and reinforce mechanisms to increase revenue collection in the neighbourhoods where it works.

The shift imposed to the PMBB by the development cooperation policy of the donor country serves to illustrate the discrepancy between the problems found at the grassroots level and the way the problems are formulated at the policy level. It is obvious that there is a need to increase community participation and organization at the grassroots level, as much as there is a need to increase cost recovery and to continue the activities aimed at the improvement of the physical conditions of the neighbourhoods. Anyone using a common sense would affirm that this would have to be kept in the new agenda of priorities of the PMBB provided that all the other sectors would gradually gain the importance they deserve.

The formulation of a new agenda of development cooperation coincides with the process of transition of Guinea-Bissau from a centrally planned to a free market economy. But the institutional aspects still remain unsolved and this is unlikely to change in the near future. This is basically due to a complicated institutional framework at the national level where overlapping of functions and responsibilities is common, the state of deterioration of the Municipality of Bissau, the lack of a well paid and trained local capacity and the scarcity of financial resources. It is likely that the processes of economic liberalization and democratization will lead to a market economy ruled by a multi party political system which will present new development scenarios for the country. This will certainly affect the public administration structure at the local level. But since it is a transitional phase, there are a number of priorities at the macro level that will delay the necessary changes at the local level. This means that the institutional problems of the Municipality of Bissau will remain for a longer period, and consequently the urban management will deteriorate, no policy will be formulated and implemented, the informal urbanization will become uncontrolled, densification and illegal building activities will increase in the popular neighbourhoods and the living conditions will tend to worsen.

The trend is to develop a city-wide approach that can cause changes at the policy level and can promote institutional reform. But in the case of the municipality of Bissau, it is impossible to reform something that just does not exist. It is first necessary to organize the municipal services and the public administration procedures before one can think about reforms and urban productivity. Everything is still to be done: from basic administrative organization to policy formulation, budget allocation, etc. A policy approach concerned with city-wide problems will certainly dilute the needs and the problems of the urban poor in the overall agenda of priorities of the city. Experience has shown that the urban poor's problems become only a priority when political campaign promises are made, soon they find out that they continue to suffer from the lack of the most essential services. It is very naive to imagine that, at least in Bissau, they will organize themselves and set their priorities in a political arena. The emphasis given to the economic dimension of urban poverty, more specifically to employment, income generation and economic development, shows only the concern to one facet of poverty and will not provide a response to the inadequate provision of basic infrastructure found in the neighbourhoods.

This paper advocates that neighbourhood upgrading is one of the instruments to alleviate urban poverty because it enables significant improvement of the living conditions of the inhabitants of the popular neighbourhoods of Bissau although it remains as a palliative solution if there is no substantial change in the other dimensions of poverty.

The integrated neighbourhood upgrading approach implemented in Cupilom de Cima seems to show a path to stimulate the development at the local level in Bissau. The provision of basic infrastructure, the settlement plan as an instrument for legalization of tenure, the participatory model and the provision of credit facilities to promote housing improvement can provide opportunities for the implementation of complementary actions aimed at the reduction of urban poverty.

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