

The Rationale of Informal Settlements Upgrading

Introductory Notes¹

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Urbanization

Several studies carried out by the World Bank by the end of the 80's confirmed the existence of a close relationship between development and urbanization². In 1989, more than half of the GNP in a great number of developing countries was generated in cities and urban centers. It is estimated that 80% of the economic growth will take place in the urban economies of Latin American and Asia. Countries such as Brazil, Colombia and Argentina already have more than 70% of their population living in urban areas. These indicators not only confirm the strategic importance of cities in the development process but also serve to alert us about the negative impacts that urbanization may have on the environment and the sustainability of cities. The urbanization phenomenon demands efficient local governments that must detain policy and planning instruments to deal creatively and effectively not only with the demographic pressure and the increasing demand for housing, infrastructure, land and public services, but also with the process of environmental deterioration already in place. Furthermore, at the local level, it is noticeable the absence of effective planning and management tools with which the technical cadre must tackle localized problems in neighborhoods and urban areas.

Informal Settlement Upgrading as an urban regeneration mechanism

The process of globalization and economic liberalization allows the easy mobility of a significant amount of international capital which is potentially available for investments in the housing and real estate and other productive sectors. This exacerbates the competition between cities to become the final destination of this capital. This competition extrapolates national state boundaries and forces city governments to pursue a "marketing" strategy to make their "products" more attractive and visible e.g. efficient governance, tax incentives, high-tech infrastructure, public security, safety, clean environment, etc. Notions of strategic planning which are widely utilized by private corporate and business planning are now incorporated in the urban planning discourse and urban management practice of local governments. The urban regeneration of traditional and/or historical neighborhoods as well as the upgrading and regularization of informal settlements become strategically important and are now part of the urban restructuring menu in several cities. The need to expand the real estate market and to widen the fiscal basis of local government taxation and revenue policies are the driving forces behind public and private sectors' efforts to incorporate these areas into the urban capitalist land and real estate market. In some countries, social and political control of these areas are the most important motivation to integrate them into the official city by regularizing ownership, expanding city's networks and public services and so on.

Informal Settlement Upgrading and the Recovery of Citizenship Rights

As an urban intervention strategy, informal settlement upgrading requires political will and firm commitment of local governments. In operational terms, it requires the establishment of an institutional and organizational setting through which (1) the participation of the target groups can be facilitated, (2) the partnerships between public, private and community stakeholders can be realized, (3) financial resources can be allocated, (4) local implementation capacities can be

¹ This introductory note is based on a paper prepared for the tailor-made workshop conducted by the author for the technical staff of the Municipality of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (1996) dealing with the management of informal settlements projects and another paper developed for a policy seminar on environmental management organized by the Economic Development Institute- EDI, World Bank (1997).

² World Bank (1991). "Urban Policy and Economic Development. An Agenda for the 1990s. The World Bank, Washington, DC.

strengthened and (5) the coordination, planning and management of programs and projects can be organized.

The experience in several countries shows that these are sine-qua-non conditions to have successful and effective upgrading programs. Besides the improvement of the living conditions which are accomplished through settlement upgrading, also the credibility of the State and local governments are recaptured since the majority of these areas had been continuously disregarded by public investment though intentions may have been more politically than welfare oriented. The citizenship question and social exclusion are partly resolved through these programs as well. Public investments are realized in the form of an upgrading package e.g. infrastructure improvements, regularization of tenure, establishment of social infrastructure, community development programs, urban poverty alleviation programs, etc. which in practice helps to establish the rights, duties and obligations of beneficiaries, public and private actors involved in the upgrading efforts. This means that the public sector invests in the provision of basic infrastructure but expects beneficiaries and consumers to pay for the services through users taxes and tariffs. On one hand, land tenure is regularized under the name of the present occupants but on the other hand land and property taxes are levied and are expected to be paid in return. Despite the impact that regularization has on household incomes, for low income residents this implies the recognition of their property by the city cadastre which consequently integrates them into the formal city. Their settlements are then included in official city maps. This change in status consequently increases the value of their plots and houses. The registered property with an official title allows owners to use them as collateral when applying for a mortgage or in any other real estate transaction. This means, they are now capable to participate and be an integral part of the market.

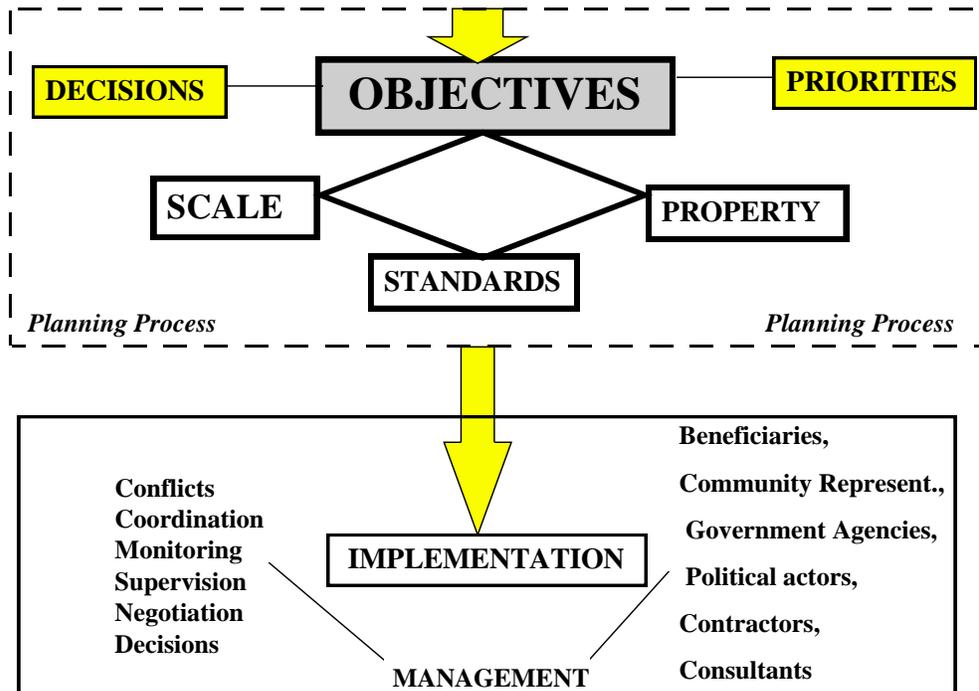
Evaluation of the Upgrading Experience

11 CASES	
MetroManila, Jakarta (KIP), Calcutta, Madras, Karachi, Ismailia, Lusaka, Managua, La Paz, Guaiacuil, Kingston	
KEY RESULTS:	<small>Skinner, Taylor & Wegelin, 1987.</small>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Induced substantial improvements in the quality and quantity of housing • Led to increased property values • Gentrification as exception rather than the rule 	
QUESTIONS REMAINING ABOUT PUBLIC INTERVENTION:	
<div style="border: 1px solid gray; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> To modify design and implementation in the future! </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> cost effectiveness . 1 land tenure . 2 rental housing (house and room renters) . 3 program financing . 4 cost recovery options . 5

An informal settlement upgrading program generates a multiplicity of interventions in the forms of projects. These projects have different objectives but basically deal with three major dimensions: the *scale* in terms of beneficiaries and number of plots; the *standards* of housing, services and infrastructure and the arrangements made for *land property* titling. Nevertheless, they have multiplying development effects. Several evaluation studies³ show that there are direct and

³ Jere, Harrington (1984). "Lusaka: local participation in planning and decision making", in G. Payne (ed), Low Income Housing in The Developing World, Wiley, Chichester; Martin, Richard (1987). "Experiences

indirect impacts at the settlement and city levels as well as at the policy and institutional levels which can be measured at a medium and long-term basis. Particularly when they are planned and implemented in a participatory manner. This foments the involvement of the inhabitants and the various stakeholders in the urban management process. In concrete terms, informal settlement upgrading helps to increase urban productivity by addressing key issues which are essential to the better functioning of the city and the welfare of its inhabitants e.g. infrastructure improvement, public works, social development, income generation, housing improvement, etc.



The various facets of the urban environmental deterioration

The process of physical, social and economic deterioration which affects several informal settlements⁴ earmarks the close relationship between poor environmental conditions, poverty and urban productivity. The lack of potable water supply and in-house crowding are common features in these areas and are directly related to the deterioration of the health conditions of the population and with the emerge of severe epidemics and respiratory illnesses. These facts directly affect the urban poor. The lack of sanitation and drainage systems are chronic in informal settlements throughout the world causing soil erosion and pollution of water sources and helping to increase mortality, morbidity and health problems among low income households; the urban poor suffer from inadequate housing conditions which seriously affect labor productivity and its reproduction.

with Monitoring and Evaluation in Lusaka”, in Wegelin, E., Skinner,R. and Taylor,J. (eds), Shelter Upgrading for the Urban Poor. Evaluation of Third World Experience, Island Publishing House, Manila; Martin, R. (1983). “Upgrading”, in Skinner,R. and Rodell, M.(eds), People, Poverty and Shelter, Methuen, London.

⁴ The denomination varies from country to country. Squatter settlements is an internationally recognized denomination. Some prefer expontaneous settlements. In Brazil they are called favelas although there are regional denominations eg. invasoes, alagados, etc. In El Salvador, they are called colonias ilegales; gecekondü in Turkey; katchi abadis in Pakistan; bidonvilles in Tunisia; slums in India and informal areas in Egypt.

In order to reverse this process, public sector intervention is required through integrated programs and projects which foster investments in social and physical infrastructures. These interventions must maximize public investments on one hand and on the other mobilize resources from the private and community sectors. Without this partnership, it will be very difficult to accomplish sustainable results. Due to the fact that the change in behavior and attitude of the public sector takes time, it is important to launch projects that:

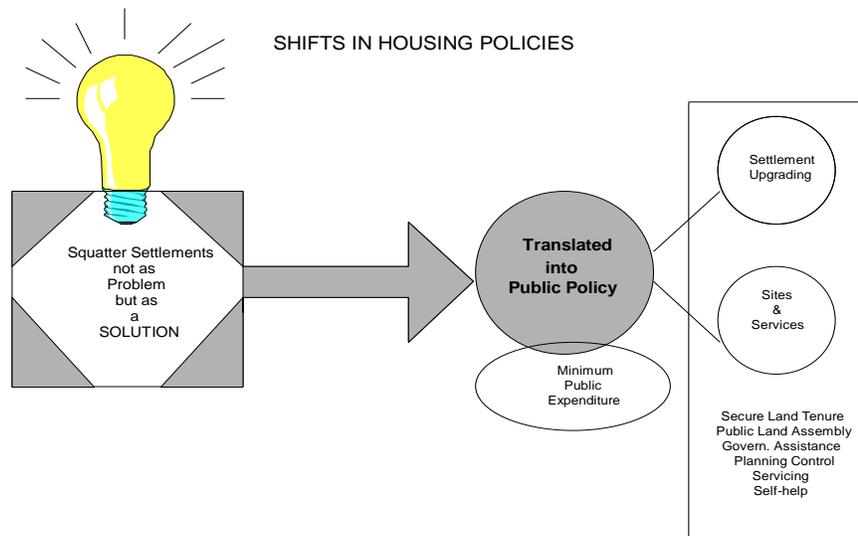
- reduce urban poverty and give perspectives to the low income population;
- foster public and private investments in infrastructure and housing improvements;
- dismantle the legal and institutional barriers that impede urban productivity and hinder the performance of the key public, private and community actors;
- promote local economic development processes at the neighborhood level;
- create an efficient urban environmental management framework.

Defining Informal Settlement Upgrading

In order to turn explicit both the objectives of the policy and the content of the projects, it is essential to define the concept of informal settlement upgrading. Settlement upgrading is defined as a process of intervention in the physical, social, economic and juridical structure of an existing human settlement which was formed through expontaneous mechanisms and unplanned processes of land occupation, normally in conflict with the existing laws, norms and regulations, where usually the urban poor find housing accommodation.

This shift in the policies of state intervention after years of pursuing eradication and eviction policies - meaning that settlements were demolished and families removed to other areas - was caused in a great deal by the recognition that squatters and informal settlements were not a problem but a SOLUTION engendered by the population who could not have neither access to land and housing nor to credit and means to purchase these urban commodities. In terms of housing policy, there is a significant change in housing provision from conventional to unconventional delivery systems which placed emphasis on minimum public expenditure and lowering of standards.

Such a modality of interventions is opposed to forced or induced resettlement and eviction policies which result in the relocation of families to new housing areas and consequently the demolition of the original settlements. Public intervention through settlement upgrading minimizes the social, economic and environmental impact derived from eviction policies since it preserves the existing social networks and community cohesion; there is a gradual adaptation of household incomes to new monthly expenditures derived from urbanization which otherwise would not happen when relocated to a new resettlement area. Resettlement projects are known to cause abrupt impact in household expenditures and to exhaust large amounts of public resources. These sites are normally situated in peripheral areas where land is usually cheaper but where transportation is more costly. Informal settlement upgrading aims at the preservation of the systems and opportunities already in place for and by the residents. It maximizes material, human and financial resources which exist in the locality. Officially or “de facto”, it recognizes the solutions brought about by the population. Generally, the projects have a set of common objectives: land regularization, infrastructure improvement, establishment of credit mechanisms to support self-help housing and housing improvement, and social & economic development.

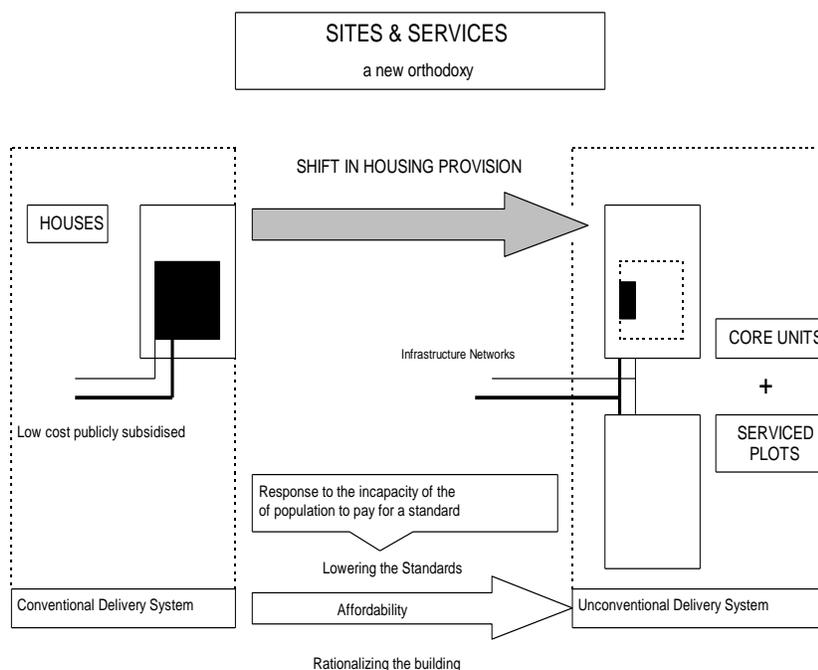


Many upgrading programs are combined with sites & services projects in order to allow the relocation of part of the residents and the demolition of houses situated in inappropriate locations. This is because many settlements are confronted with technical and legal barriers derived from high density of occupation, inappropriate accesses, hazard sites, legal and tenure obstacles and so on.

State intervention: old themes in new words

Informal settlement upgrading is not a new idea. Already in the 1950's, countries such as Peru, Indonesia, India and Turkey already had adopted this approach for the problems of informal urbanization. The reasons and motives vary. During the 1970's, although some countries or cities were promoting the urbanization of these settlements, the repressive "bulldozer" eviction policy predominated. The practical viability of this policy was also laid down by large scale land acquisition carried out before hand which was intended to be utilized as reserve for urbanization. This was expected to be sponsored and conducted by the State. Mechanisms of control were introduced in order to impede expansion and densification of informal areas. Often, repressive instruments were used by local authorities to control informal urbanization. Many developing countries pursued this approach until researches and the international experience started to give evidences about the failures of the eradication policies, its shortcoming and the perverse effects it had on the urban poor.

At the late 1970's and during the 1980's, a gradual world-wide shift started to take place as much as experiences in Peru, Indonesia (KIP), Zambia (Lusaka experience) and the Philippines among others were disseminated. This shift was already advocated during the Habitat I Conference, in 1976, Montreal, Canada, and subsequently influenced by donor and funding agencies such as the World Bank which started to promote new approaches through lending policies. The new doctrine is incorporated to housing policies with projects and programs focusing on regularization of tenure and infrastructure improvements. The assumption was that by resolving the land ownership problem residents would be motivated to invest their own resources in housing improvements. The upgrading programs were combined to sites and services projects where full ownership of plots were awarded to future inhabitants. Special arrangements were made regarding cost recovery and community participation in order to foster replicability and sustainability of the projects. Sites & Services projects were to become the new orthodoxy.



Several studies and evaluation researches⁵ revealed that the regularization of land ownership was costly and a time consuming process which hindered the achievements of projects. Cost recovery was hardly accomplished in the way the World Bank had foreseen which negatively affected their replicability and sustainability; and the impacts of sites & services on institutional and policy reform was minimal if not null. The urban problems were “projectized” and these projects never managed to be replicated on a large scale.

During the 1990's, as decentralization and privatization emerge as new development paradigms, the role of local governments are stressed by donor agencies and international funding institutions as the organization responsible for the management of urban development and with the mandate to undertake city-wide policy and institutional reform⁶. Regarding informal settlements, the attention is shifted to a package of infrastructure improvements combined with basic public services provision and the physical/spatial restructuring of the settlements followed by regularization of tenure and property rights⁷. As mentioned earlier in this paper, these

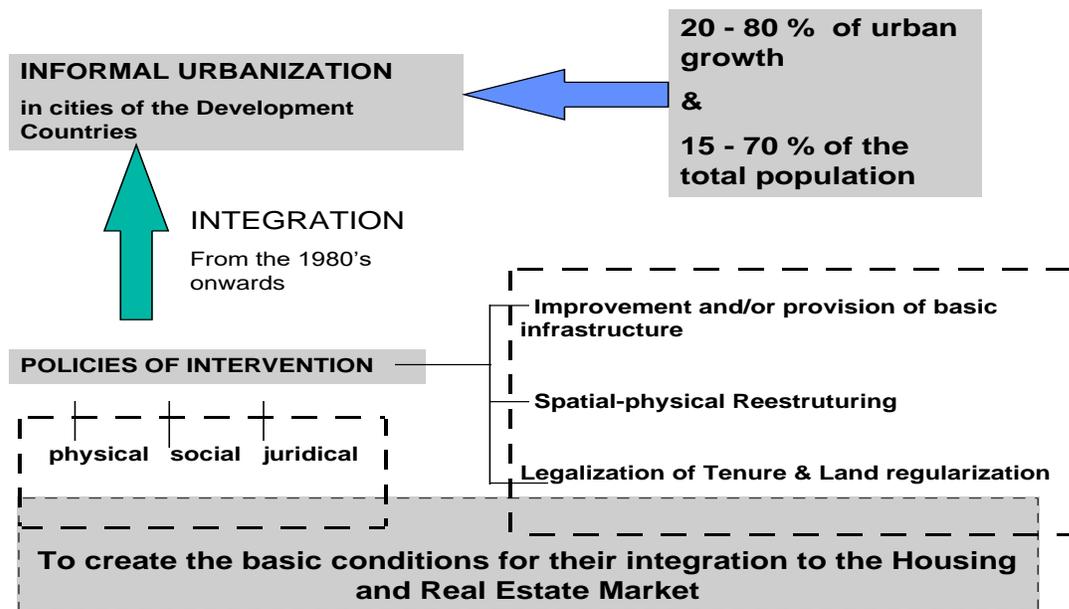
⁵ Payne, G. (ed), “Low Income Housing in The Developing World”, Wiley, Chichester; Wegelin, E., Skinner, R. and Taylor, J. (eds), Shelter Upgrading for the Urban Poor. Evaluation of Third World Experience, Island Publishing House, Manila; Skinner, R. and Rodell, M. (eds), People, Poverty and Shelter, Methuen, London.

⁶ International donor organizations formulated policy documents where this shift is explicit. Among them the World Bank (1991), *ibid.*; UN-United Nations, Commission on Human Settlements (1991). “The Significance of Human Settlements and the Global Strategy for Shelter for the Year 2000 to the Concept of Sustainable Development...”. UN report HS/C/13/6. Harare, memo. 17 pp. UNDP-United Nations Development Programme (1991). “Cities, People & Poverty. Urban Development Co-operation for the 1990s”. A UNDP strategy paper, UNDP, New York. 94 pp. Bilateral organisations also formulated specific policy documents which (re)directed bilateral aid regarding the urban sector.

⁷ Durand-Lasserve, Aland and Valerie Clerc (1996). “Regularization and Intergration of Irregular Settlements: lessons from experience”, UMP Working Paper Series no. 6, Urban Management Program, UNDP/UNCHS/World Bank. Mercado, Rodolfo and Ricardo Uzin (1996). “Regularization of Spontaneous Settlements”, Building Issue no. 2, Vol.8, Lund Centre for Habitat Studies, University of Lund, Sweden.

interventions are geared to social, economic, physic and juridical integration of the informal city to the formal and official city.

Except for this integration effort and the emphasis given to informal settlement upgrading as an instrument to foster housing and real estate market expansion and its improved performance, we can state that almost nothing new has been invented in relation to the upgrading experiences during the last 20 years. Some instruments for land regularization and creative juridical solutions such as the ones utilized in Peru and in Rio de Janeiro intend to speed up and to simplify the process of land titling; self-management and community-based initiatives are more empowering oriented and serve as catalytic instrument to foster self-determination and local management mechanisms, specially in countries where democratization and local government autonomy has been conquered and broadened such as the Philippines, Brazil and South Africa. Some experiences managed to create an economic and financial basis for program continuity such as the Ismailia's Hail El Salam project but failed to cause the city-wide institutionalization of such practices; in Zambia, the long-term upgrading experience lead to community-based training and local development processes based on limited and endogenous financial resources. Some programs such as the ones in Rio de Janeiro and Egypt are geared to intensify the presence of the State in the settlements in order to neutralize the informal power systems and the influence of organizations contrary to its interests and/or the established laws e.g. the drug traffic organizations in the former and the religious/political groups in the latter.



The new aphorism is “integration” instead of upgrading. Physical integration and the transformation of these settlements into neighborhoods through direct public investments, opening of roads, connection to city’s infrastructure networks and public services, merging to the city’s cadastre and official maps; social integration, meaning that specific programs addressing community needs, vocational training and social development are implemented vis-à-vis the public works; juridical integration means the regularization of land parceling and individual plot titling and final resolution of land ownership issues which complements city-wide cadastre needed to collect property taxes and user’s taxes and tariffs. In this respect, juridical integration actually means enlarging local governments’ tax base. Integration also means the total integration of these settlements to the local housing and real estate property markets.

Coordination and Conflict Resolution

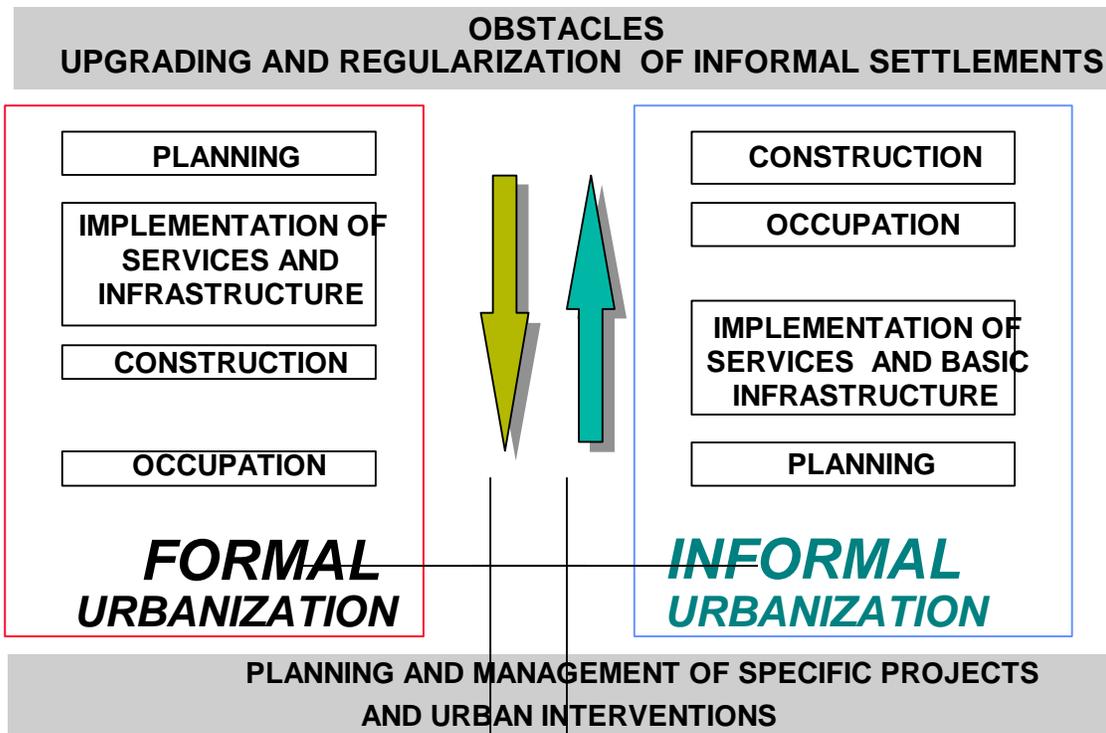
Urban management instruments are introduced as a way to guarantee the continuity of these programs and their respective integration to the city-wide policy reform and institutional building effort. In the past, many cities opted to create an organizational structure to implement upgrading projects, with specific responsibilities to plan, execute, monitor and manage the entire process of program and project development and implementation. Experiences from Lusaka (Zambia), Brasilia (Brazil), Ismailia (Egypt) and Bissau (Guinea-Bissau) are examples and variants of this approach. The complexities of these settlements and the need to involve a large variety of actors and stakeholders, it becomes essential to set up a coordination structure and management mechanisms as well as an institutional framework in which their responsibilities, tasks and obligations are spelled out. An upgrading program usually involved several public institutions responsible for the provision of basic public services and infrastructure which are either municipal, state or national government entities; besides, one must consider community-based organizations, local business associations, private contractors, politicians, religious organizations, etc. which all have a convergent and/or divergent interest with one another.

The context in which we plan and implement and upgrading project is usually very complex, dynamic, turbulent and at times very hostile, where different economic, social and political forces converge and diverge along the process. For those who are directly responsible for the planning, operational and execution phases of the process, it implies specific planning & managerial skills and specific abilities to manage conflict resolution. Besides that, the experience shows that the coordination and management of programs and projects need to be well resolved in order to create a conducive platform for conflict resolution and efficient management of public and private investments both at the higher and local levels. This institutional and organizational basis are considered as a prerequisite for an efficient implementation and monitoring of an informal settlement upgrading policy which is capable to generate a local development process. It is through the establishment of transparent, participatory and efficient urban management that this can be accomplished. The present trend towards decentralization and strengthening of local governments creates new opportunities to institutionally internalize informal settlement upgrading.

Problems during the Operationalization of Projects

Many projects face several obstacles during the execution phase because of little attention given to the problem formulation and thereafter their objectives which are by itself caused by an inadequate participation of key stakeholders during the initial phases. The utilization of conventional planning methods and analytical tools hinders the processes of project formulation and local priority setting since the logic of informal settlements formation is rather opposite to the logic planners, architects and engineers are trained with.

The lack of involvement of the inhabitants and ultimate beneficiaries of the projects is low and therefore it is common to find projects resolving what is a symptom and not exactly the crux of the problem. Consequently, there is little identification between the inhabitants the entire process of project planning and implementation. Furthermore, in order to deal effectively and efficiently with informal settlement upgrading, housing practitioners and urban planners must detain non-conventional planning skills and participatory tools which will assist them to launch meaningful actions and result oriented processes at the settlement level.



The choice of the project already reveals that:

- for the inhabitants, in order to secure tenure, public investment in infrastructure, roads and basic public/community services would be enough instead of engendering into complex institutional and legal procedures that only cost time and money;
- at times, by resolving the accessibility through the improvement of main roads would be sufficient instead of opting at first for the entire physical/spatial restructuring of the settlement;
- urban standards applied elsewhere in the city are usually not appropriate to these areas and should be redesigned or adapted to the local situations;
- self-help housing improvement is not always a general solution, instead, inhabitants would prefer to have small scale local contractors and a small credit to support housing improvement;
- keeping the settlement layout intact is not always the option regarded as the best by the inhabitants who seem to read better the difficulties implicit in some peculiar layout of accesses and private domains;

The projects must have a maximum of flexibility meaning that the institutional, the legal, administrative and political environment in which the project is inserted must follow the same principle. Management and coordination mechanisms are therefore essential. The rigidity of urban and building norms and regulations inhibit innovative solutions and make the consolidation of these settlements more difficult for the inhabitants specially if they are expected to play a predominant role in the incremental development process. The lack of quick administrative response of government agencies create other levels of difficulties.

In terms of long-term development and replicability of actions, the problems related to cost recovery (either partial or complete) of public investments carried out in the settlement represent the most representative risk for the continuation and broadening of these types of projects. Besides, conflicts and disputes about land ownership may simply turn the entire project unfeasible.

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