

Mainstreaming Participatory Approaches in Slum Upgrading Programmes:

A Case Study of Soweto East Project in Kibera, Nairobi

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Abstract

This paper set out to highlight the relationship between effective stakeholder engagement and/or participatory approaches on sustainability of slum upgrading using Soweto East in Kibera. Data was obtained largely through a review of reports and literature. The results of the study indicated that there was low level of participation by the affected residents and other stakeholders. This led to mistrusts and misconceptions and consequently poor design and mixed results on the overall project success. It thus concluded that there is need for robust community engagement especially in slum upgrading; ensuring that slum upgrading projects integrate livelihood and beneficiary economic activities for inclusive and sustainable development. In addition, the paper proposed that engagement processes should be based on genuine collaboration to foster trust and desire for success between the various stakeholders.

Keywords: Participation, slums, Nairobi, urbanization, development

INTRODUCTION

Rapid urban population growth amidst scarce resources for provision of infrastructure and services has seen about 60 percent of urban population live in informal settlements and obtain basic services informally (UN Habitat, 2020). Attempts at improving the living conditions of slum dwellers over the years, have been negatively offset by overwhelming slum growth (Perry, 2014). Millington and Clelan (2017) observed that during the last 50 years, governments have implemented a wide range of slum upgrading projects and programmes of varying scale and scope that have improved the lives of many slum dwellers. Despite this, the growth of slums and informal settlements is only getting worse, particularly in developing countries, and the total number of slum dwellers has increased (Millington and Clelan, 2017). This scenario is greatly undermining the ability of cities in developing countries to economically grow, prosper, and generate wealth (UN-Habitat, 2012).

In spite of the ever-growing presence of urban informality within cities of the developing world, it is widely acknowledged that there is a poor understanding on the process and existence of

informal settlements (Roy, 2005; Smit 2006 in Huchzermeyer, 2008). Even though it is quite over-simplistic and misleading to equate informal settlements to the urban poor (Roy, 2004), it has also been proven by the dynamics of urban poverty that most often informal settlements provide the cheapest alternative for the urban poor to survive in the city (Okyere and Kita, 2015). Ejihu (2011) added that informal settlements have been seen to favor the poor and contribute to their livelihoods than the 'formal' city does. The factors driving urban informality and informal settlements in urban Africa does not relate to the poor, as has been commonly understood but planning philosophy, policy and strategy, state actions and unguarded liberalization practices together produce a potent force that create the conditions for urban informal settlements to flourish (Okyere and Kita, 2015).

One persistent challenge relates to mechanisms for fostering effective community engagement for improving living conditions in slums (Muraya, 2006, Hossain, 2007, Das, A.K. et al; 2009). This is because mechanisms for effective public participation and/or community engagement is

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complicated, can be time consuming (Dupont et al., 2014) and are often neglected (Croese et al., 2016). Instead, with profit, prestige, and simplified management in mind, large centralized projects continue to be developed, despite the fact that they may further marginalize the poor and leave them critically vulnerable (Andreasen and Møller-Jensen, 2016, Buckley et al., 2015). The pilot project was intended to generate synergies in bottom-up and top-down collaborations.

A significant feature of past slum improvement projects were that were largely focused on housing with scant attention to basic urban infrastructure and services (Otiso, 2003 and Muraya, 2006). Interestingly, this narrow focus contributed to their failures – often leading to damaging legacies of mistrust and suspicion by project affected persons. Typically the projects were large, centralized and led by institutions with power and resources. However, they were unable to mobilize and involve the local communities. The examples in Nairobi include: i) The Pumwani-Majengo Project initiated in 1983 (National Housing Corporation, 2004); ii) Kibera High Rise Project initiated in 1990s, both displaced local residents; and iii) the Mathare 4A project that started in March 1997, failed because it alienated the local people (Kamau, et al, 2002, Otiso, 2003).

The failure of the slum upgrading projects highlights the centrality of community support for their successful implementation and further points out of obtaining the same where “top-down” approaches are adopted (Das A.K et al, 2009 and Andreasen and Møller-Jensen, 2016, Croese et al., 2016). However according to Meredith and, Melanie (2017) while “bottom-up” initiatives led by community groups may generate local engagement, they may not have the institutional depth, material or financial resources, or longevity to achieve sustainable positive outcomes. Therefore, a hybrid approach that mobilizes the resources of large agencies (including governments) and yet successfully engages the community may be most effective approach for slum upgrading. The main objective of this paper is to highlight the contribution of adoption of participatory approaches and principles on the processes and outcomes of the slum upgrading programmes in Kibera.

THEORY

Participatory development theory refers to involvement of project and programme stakeholders in the development process and has been globally adopted but more especially in developing countries (Oakley, 1991; Bryant & White, 1982; Burkey, 1993; and Rahman, 1993). The theory relates to active involvement of people in decision making processes with respect to design and implementation of processes, programs and projects, which affect them (Slocum, Wichhart, Rocheleau, & Thomas- Slayter, 1995). The observation by Wignaraja (1991:202) that, participatory development refers to top-down participation while participation in development refers to bottom-up participation highlights the distinction between the two concepts. The two that participatory development and participation-in-development should however be recognized as being central to understanding of the practice of participation. However, it is still difficult to distinguish bottom-up “alternative development” and top-down “mainstream development” (Kaiser, 2020). Pieterse’s (1998:344-350) introduction of a new concept that is mainstream alternative development (MAD) further adds to the confusion but also creates the agency needed to create a clear and relevant concept especially for the global south.

In general top-down development efforts have despite employment of significant resources failed to bring significant changes in the lives of the poor over past decades. This thus remains a major push for participation is its ability of enabling of community ownership, accountability, and empowerment of beneficiaries especially in developing countries like Kenya (Kaiser, 2020). Thus the need to facilitate the coexistence and continuity of both approaches – as this would promote interaction and dialogue at all levels. Emerging success stories on development related to China and India further reinforce this argument (Kaiser, 2020).

The increasing complexity of urban challenges further highlights the need for multifaceted approaches for urban projects and especially slum upgrading. The power of effective urban development lies in acknowledging the complexity of urban spaces and adoption of synergetic and complementary approaches. In this sense, top-

down and bottom-up planning together allow for the creation of flexible urban frameworks that are customizable to different contexts. State-led, top-down planning is highly essential to establish a city's grand vision. Bottom-up strategies help guarantee that the grand vision aligns with citizens' needs and desires. Drawing attention to their unique cultural, social, and economic dynamics. Thus communities are placed at the heart of planning and/or project implementation. Blending the approaches can help nurture a more nuanced urban fabric - one that respects local character, enables equity, and addresses issues of climate change and social integration. The strengths of both strategies are combined to produce inclusive and resilient cities (Gattupalli, 2023).

According to UN-Habitat (2020B) participation is about inclusion and a commitment to improving the lives of slum dwellers that embraces various dimensions and components of participatory city-wide slum upgrading such as: i) people (stakeholders); ii) practical processes; iii) principles of reciprocal of rights; and iv) results achieved. Indeed UN Habitat (2020B) sees participatory process as a pre-condition for inclusive sustainable urbanization. Most slum upgrading programmes initiated and funded by national governments have failed as they adopted top down approaches (Termeer, et al, 2022). This situation has been observed in the case of Kibera slum upgrading project as well (Amelia et al. 2011). The results of the study by (Amelia et al. 2011) revealed that most respondents perceived the project as having been imposed by high level decision-makers (top-down approach).

This perception is enhanced by the inappropriate focus of these projects (Werlin, 1999). In general most slum upgrading programmes concentrate on housing improvements and ignore other slum livelihoods that are equally important. This further point to addressing the issues from a top-down level. This lends credence to Torstenson's (1994) view that upgrading programme are guided by Western norms. This can be partly addressed by integrating behavioural aspects of slum dwellers to enhance sustainability. This certainly calls for focus on the local communities and fully appreciating their desires and wants.

Kenya's history on slum upgrading remains varied and unfocused. They have included:

non-intervention, low-cost housing provision, slum demolitions and eviction, resettlement and relocations and finally, the slum upgrading programs (Agayi and Serdaroglu, 2020). The recent slum upgrading activities have partly aimed at promoting a bottom-up approach (RoK, 2017). In addition, as Uzun and Simsek (2015:159) observes the strategy also aims undertaking comprehensive and integrated actions thus improving the social, physical, environmental, and economic conditions of the present state of urban space rather than planning and development of new areas.

RESEARCH METHODS

Soweto East village of Kibera slum in Nairobi city was selected for the case study. The area was selected for the study due to its unique characteristics that include: poor housing conditions, overcrowding, and lack of land-tenure security, inadequate safe water supply, and poor hygiene among others. The study is limited to Soweto East village within Kibera slum, where the pilot project of slum upgrading in Kenya was conducted. Soweto East had a total population of 19,318 was among the first to be selected for the pilot because it had less land ownership problems compared to other villages. In addition, the area occupants were considered more cohesive, were better organized in comparison to other villages within Kibera. Thus it was viewed as easier for mobilization, the size of the population was also considered suitable for a pilot project. In addition, many residents were structure owners and this was seen as a positive factor that would make easier to reach a consensus or agreements with the project affected persons as any improvement would benefit them (Ogundele, 2014:16).

Data for the study was obtained through a review of program documents, reports and existing literature. Analysis of the materials focused on: (i) assessing dimensions and components of top-down and bottom-up participatory in slum upgrading; (ii) giving critiques on effective implementation of top-down and bottom-up participatory approaches in Kibera's Soweto East slum upgrading project (iii) providing suggestions for effective implementation of top-down and bottom-up participatory approaches in slum upgrading. By critically analyzing the previous studies, journals and reports, and comparing the findings, this research was able to determine the

gaps in the participatory slum upgrading project stakeholders' identification and analyses, practical process, human right based principles, and results achieved reflecting stakeholders' needs and impact lives among dimensions and components of participatory slum upgrading.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It emerged that despite intentions to adopt participatory processes in the slum upgrading programme, in reality it ended up embracing involuntary and top-down approaches. As a consequence, the programme faced several challenges including; mistrust, reluctance and/or resistance to relocate the affected persons to the temporary relocation sites. That the project was donor and funds driven, top down imposed by senior government officials (Amelia et al; 2011). Thus views of stakeholders were not taken into account.

The study further revealed that the project had poor consultations, limited understanding of the local context thus leading to complaints over beneficiary lists, prioritizing housing ownership yet the majority see their urban settlement as temporary and care more about investing in housing their rural homes. Emerging from this that there was poor communication with stakeholders, limited consensus building and lack of appreciation of local knowledge and initiatives actively engaging vulnerable and marginalized groups.

As a consequence, it emerged that about 11% of the respondents complained that they were not on the list of beneficiaries (Amelia et al. 2011). This finding reaffirmed the earlier findings by Amnesty International, (2009B) that revealed that this occurred because of the process of compilation of list of beneficiaries that relied on the names of heads of households. Households are mostly men, so that in case of separation (the instability of unions is quite high in Nairobi slums), the man keeps all the documents including the identity card that guarantees the inclusion in the list of those entitled to temporary relocation and the awarding of permanent housing.

It also emerged that the project had no guidelines for identification and integration of the vulnerable groups. Indeed, Amnesty International's report

(2009B:4) further asserted that the most vulnerable persons were ignored, residents were not consulted or informed, and mechanisms to create and/or ensure affordable housing were not put in place. The programme thus failed to assess vulnerability within the community, and further failed to protect vulnerable persons.

Although the level of participation in the planning phase was expected to higher, the study established that it was it was deficient. That the programme did not adequately consult, inform and did not collaborate with the community and/or beneficiaries. Yet as Hamdi and Goethert, (1998), this phase requires more intense consultation and collaboration to ensure that concerns of stakeholders are integrated in plan for sustainable implementation. This requires engagement across the various processes as envisaged by UN Habitat (2020B) in slum upgrading programmes. Thus participatory process therefore involves empowering beneficiaries' capacity for effective engagement and inclusion by raising awareness, building consensus and commitment. The process leads to increased community ownership and support.

However, it is time consuming, requires care, mutual respect and commitment. However, it emerged that there were gaps in informing beneficiaries, non-effective consultation, inadequate involvement in decision making processes and lack of support for independent community initiatives. Indeed Amnesty International (2009B) reported that about 90 per cent of the respondent residents cited inadequate involvement of the residents in the project activities. Thus as Fernandez, (2011:3) asserts that the shortcomings denied the residents access to important information on the project including the cost of housing, the construction plans, and other crucial details about house allocation process in the receiving site. This contributed to the resultant mistrust, lack of collaboration and the assumption that the slum dwellers wanted to become homeowners. In reality, a considerable number of slum dwellers saw their life in urban area as transitional and were only keen on investing on housing in their rural homes (Amnesty International, 2009B).

The study further revealed that the residents were unhappy over high rents, poor house designs;

disruption of social networks, lack of clarity on ownership of the new houses; lack of space for economic activities, slow pace of upgrading project and lack of playgrounds among others. As Agayi and Serdaroğlu (2020) have pointed out; relocation of residents was haphazard and did not take into consideration the spatial, social, cultural, and economic impacts on the slum residents. This partly led to renting out of the houses by a number of beneficiaries and moving back to the shanties, making a mockery of the government's efforts to improve their living conditions (Lukorito, 2015).

It also emerged that due to lack of space for economic activities on the site, all the areas intended for recreation and gardens within the residential area were taken up by informal activities. In some cases the veranda of the apartments on the ground floor into kiosks. This led new attempts at developing suitable Kiosks within the settlements so that residents can continue with their informal activities (Amelia et al, 2011).

On social impact Amelia et al. (2011) observed that those who were relocated underwent drastic changes in their living conditions. They assert the social costs were however difficult to measure but it was evident that their social networks were disrupted and in some cases completely destroyed. This led to extreme individualization and fragmentation of social ties. This further contributed to the high prevalence of psychological disorders.

The study further revealed that environmental concerns were not taken into serious considerations leading to extensive environmental degradation (Chege, 2013). And as Lukorito (2015) reported the new flats experienced acute shortage of water supply as well as waste management problems. Huge rubbish heaps could be seen both inside and outside the gated compounds. Thus as Lukorito (2015) reports an interview with one Ms Mugure (a second hand clothe seller) said that the living conditions in her current house are not much different from the life they led in the Soweto East slums. She added that misses the way of life in the slum. She further lamented that; "many of problems that we hoped to escape from in the slum have followed us." She further added that; "we experience acute water shortages here. For instance, blocks A, B, C, P and H have not had running water for more than a month now. Most

residents have to queue for long hours for water." She further added that; "My family of four shares a house with two other families with four members each and we have many problems when it comes to sharing the kitchen."

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear from the study that adoption participatory approach in slum upgrading programmes is not only key to successful implementation but also to ensuring sustainable and inclusive slum upgrading. However, it requires sincere and robust engagement with all stakeholders. This is particularly important in cases of informal settlements due to their complexities, which requires a better understanding of the existing situation as well as their needs, interests, attitudes, practices and behaviour of the affected households.

In addition, the study concluded that slum upgrading projects should involve stakeholders at the earliest so as to integrate their views in the project design to ensure increased ownership by project affected households, enhance relevance and appropriateness, and improve project acceptance and sustainability. Thus in case of Soweto East Project there would have been two categories of housing proposed by the project, namely: i) rental houses; and ii) modern flats. The rental houses would have been affordable and meant for those who are not keen on owning homes in Nairobi, while the modern flats would be for those interested in home ownership in Nairobi.

Finally, the study further concluded that success of slum upgrading schemes requires a multifaceted approach that includes addressing livelihood and/or integration of economic activities of project affected persons. And that this would require participation of both the private sector and civil society groups to ensure program and/or project sustainability. In the end it would lead addressing barriers to sustainable participation in economic activities by the beneficiaries.

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