

HOUSING RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT UNIT
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UPGRADING OF HOUSING SCHEMES

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UPGRADING OF HOUSING SCHEMES

1. Introduction:

A thorough discussion on upgrading schemes, from inception to implementation could be very lengthy, Depending on the level of details, it would require much more time than is available for the topic in to-day's meeting.

I therefore intend to confine myself to an outline of the broad framework of the upgrading exercise and I am sure that the discussion to follow will go into some of the details.

The term 'upgrading' has more than one definition and the objectives will be influenced by social, economic and political considerations. Upgrading will also depend on the level of services or lack of them, in a given situation. For the purpose of this paper, we shall define upgrading of housing schemes as;

'the creation of improved physical, social and economic conditions in substandard housing areas, through the provision of basic infrastructure services and community facilities with the minimum disruption or demolition of the existing structural and social fabric.'

Upgrading of housing schemes has now come to be widely accepted by governments as one of the ways of improving housing conditions for the low income group in a way they can afford and in relatively healthy environments.

The Kenya Government Development Plan 1974-78 contains, as one of its objectives on housing, the following:-

- (iv) To ensure that (a) no additional unauthorised housing settlements are erected, (b) slums are removed when alternative housing has been found, and (c) substandard housing is improved.

The scale of the problem of substandard housing settlements is so large that the attention of international bodies and agencies has been attracted, and organisations such as the World Bank are assisting in financing upgrading of sub-standard housing in many developing countries. The World Bank is already financing a study on sub-standard and squatter settlements in Kenya. It is hoped that this study will lead to the physical and social upgrading of areas such as Mathare in Nairobi, Chaani in Mombasa and Manyatta in Kisumu.

As indicated in our definition, there are three main areas of concern in the upgrading process; - improved physical, social and economic conditions. In order to obtain successful solutions, each of these aspects must be taken into account and evaluated, and I shall discuss these in turn, very shortly.

However, in addition to these there is another aspect which deserves mention. This is the aspect of security of tenure.

The deplorable physical state of many squatter settlements can be attributed to the lack of security of tenure by the settlers who feel no responsibility to maintain houses and surroundings. This insecurity is heightened by the constant fear of raids by the authorities, - a fear that discourages investment in the area. By securing tenure, the inhabitant feels confident that whatever improvements he makes to the house and plot are for his own good.

Security of tenure also provides the houseowner with an acceptable security against which he can raise a loan or mortgage which would enable him to make improvements.

There may be a number of settlements that require upgrading and one has to make a decision as to which of the areas to start with. The following could be used as criteria for this selection:

Scale, or size: The settlement should be large enough to be economically viable, or a neighbourhood which can support the amenities provided.

level of Infra-structure Services

Priority should be given to settlements most deficient in basic services such as water and sewerage.

Topographic Conditions:

The topography should allow economic servicing and installation of infrastructure.

Housing Conditions: The houses must be worth up-grading as opposed to carton box and plastic sheeting structures.

Overspill: If displacement is anticipated, settlements with adjacent suitable land to accommodate overspill are preferable.

Once the initial selection of the settlement to be upgraded is made, a socio-economic survey should be mounted to establish the social structure, economic levels and the priorities of the residents. Concurrent with this survey or immediately after it, a technical field survey should be carried out to establish the existing road and footpath networks, activity nodes, physical constraints and actual locations of houses and other buildings, carefully noting their conditions.

Based on the results of the two surveys, the design of upgrading can commence.

I shall now quickly discuss the main aspects of upgrading a scheme and try to highlight some of the constraints encountered in the process.

II Physical Aspects of Upgrading:

Physical upgrading involves provision of water, sewers or some form of disposal, including storm water drainage, roads or accessibility, electricity and community facilities such as schools, health centres, playing fields, open spaces and other amenities. It also involves, usually by the people themselves, the upgrading or improvement of the shelter. Provision of these aspects has many constraints and it is on these constraints that the level of upgrading eventually achieved will depend.

Services: The provision of water and sewage facilities is usually a top priority for most upgrading schemes because with these services, the level of health hazard is greatly reduced, and in general, the living standards and life expectancy raised.

Unless these services can be provided at reasonable cost, the upgrading exercise will be abortive because the beneficiaries will not be able to pay for them. This is very important in Kenya and many other countries where no direct government subsidy on housing is provided.

Depending on economic availability and other supply constraints water can be provided on plot or at central watering points. Similarly, sewers can be laid to each plot or communal toilet blocks can be installed. Electricity is usually a low priority and may be confined, initially, to street lighting and to the communal toilet blocks. It is acknowledged that shared or communal facilities often become misused as it is difficult to apportion responsibility. Careful design and management could however, reduce the level of misuse.