Community participation in comprehensive upgrading programmes in developing countries

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Abstract

Urban life defines the character of communities and the life quality of urban dwellers. Urban expansion, unequal incomes and social conflicts create gaps of development, which lead cities towards intolerance and segregation, compromising the ability of low-income communities to participate in the improvement of their environment. Furthermore, the failure of governments to foresee the consequences of urban policy in weak economies denies the urban poor their rights as citizens. In consequence, the meaning of participation is distorted, development is achieved through top-down processes, negotiation and manipulation of communities.

Sustainable development in the global south relies on understanding the role of communities in urban expansion, along with the emergence, growth and consolidation of informal settlements. A framework for comprehensive upgrading programmes that supports community initiatives could become the basis for sustainable urban development. In this sense, it is essential to understand the main constituents of comprehensive upgrading and the requirements, in terms of spatial improvement, legitimacy, social development and governance. These programmes would not only become a holistic and effective strategy to react to existing problems in informal settlements, but also would prevent the proliferation, and improve the life quality of the urban poor. Comprehensive upgrading programmes address efficiently the needs of the poor and empower them to participate. Participative processes become catalysts for city-wide integral development, prevent the proliferation of informality and encourage social integration, which could diminish the gap throughout the different sectors of society.

Keywords: community participation, comprehensive slum upgrading, informal settlements, sustainable urban development, governance.

1   Introduction

Globalisation driven by political and economic pressures influence urban policy, which in the context of weak economies lead to segregation of communities and deprives them from their rights as citizens [2]. As governments fail in the task of conceiving an appropriate vision of the future, consequent with their context-specific necessities, the problem of restricted citizenship engenders tensions in urban development and hinders sustainability, especially in developing countries, where urban expansion is encouraged by unstable political structures, social conflicts and scarcity of opportunities.

Sustainable development could become the answer for prompt growth in urban areas, as sustainability combines in the same idea social, economic and urban development. However, current urban growth processes in the developing world become the strongest obstacles to implement sustainability. Furthermore, urban expansion is aggravated by the incidence of poverty in cities, evidenced by the exponential increase of low-income population in the past decades. Poverty has conquered developing societies, forcing them to look outside governmental structures for the means to survive in hostile urban environments.

2   Urban growth and informality

Informality emerges from scarcity of resources and opportunities to address the needs of the growing urban poor. Exclusion and economic stagnation reinforce the position of the informal sector, while the formal city isolates and stigmatises these communities. The ability of informality, as urban actor, to adapt in size and scope becomes a significant factor in development. These invisible marginal societies accumulate power, human and physical resources [6].

Understanding the situation of informality in urban areas is recognising the importance of these invisible societies in the lives of the urban poor to satisfy necessities. The informal sector provides employment, along with housing for a large share of the urban population, covering between 40% to 60% of the overall housing stock in developing cities [7]. The need for affordable housing leads the urban poor to create new informal communities. In the last decades, these communities grew promptly, allowing them to be visible in the city, accounted for 31,6% of the total urban population [8]. The urban image declined, poverty became customary rather than exceptional and forced governments to implement institutional transformations in order to address the rising urban problems in a holistic way [5]. The urban poor live with and from the informal sector which makes the task of planning for sustainability even more intricate, since the influence of informality is not constrained to housing; it expands to economy, welfare, as well as the social necessities that the local government fails to provide.

"Policies must address the current situation of socio-economic and institutional systems, removing inefficiencies and making them flexible with an integrative multi-sectorial goal" [5].

3   Upgrading strategies for informal settlements

The problem of informal settlements has forced governments to react to urban expansion in diverse ways. Former efforts translated into reactive upgrading strategies i.e. eviction, paternalism, site and services and self-help, measures generally associated to the influence of international institutions in urban policy throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The United Nations, the World Bank and many Non-Governmental Organisations have promoted upgrading strategies in the developing world through loans and grants, accompanied by imposed foreign development processes, which neglect the specific cultural, social and physical context of communities. Furthermore, the concept of informality and informal settlements is not yet clear in every context. The inability of imposed strategies to adapt to diverse contexts challenges the effectiveness of measures and quality of outputs, since the conditions of informal settlements differ in each country. The approaches have been naïve and constrained by budgets, political willingness and lack of comprehension of the dimensions of poverty. The limited success of the improvements is a consequence of implementing partial measures that address one single aspect of poverty. Overlooking the multidimensional complexity of poverty exposes the lack of understanding about the real needs of the urban poor, along with the reluctance of municipal authorities to engage in holistic upgrading programmes. As result, informal settlements expand, gentrification boosts, supported by paternalistic social policy, and the urban boundaries stretch to unthinkable limits [10]. These strategies, although implemented in several countries, have shown to be inefficient and unsustainable in the long term [9].

Upgrading strategies generally address land tenure regularisation, financing mechanisms, provision of infrastructure and services, and partnerships for participatory approaches in planning [7]. The main characteristic of these strategies is that governments continue to be owners, as well as providers of infrastructure and housing, approaching low-income communities through conciliatory policy.

"Perhaps the single and most important factor in the limited success or scope of so many housing and urban development projects supported by governments and international agencies over the last 40 years is the lack of influence allowed groups of urban poor in their conception, location, design, resource mobilisation and management, and evaluation" [11].

As Marisa Guaraldo [3] exposes, the inclusion of communities rarely grasps the real meaning of participation, understood as the empowerment of communities to influence decision-making processes. On the contrary, urban development is driven through conciliation, diplomacy and, in many cases, manipulation of the population. Thus, informality is transformed into an urban phenomenon which spreads throughout the city, from urbanisation to the economy and social networks, becoming the means for the urban poor to survive in disadvantaged conditions, where sustainability is unrealistic, unattainable and perpetuates poverty cycles, propagating problems and necessities.

4 Comprehensive upgrading of informal settlements

The future scenario shows that 70% of the world´s population growth is expected to occur in developing countries, challenging the ability of governments to manage an increase of two billion dwellers in cities, where the local situation is already severe [12]. In order to achieve sustainable development in the global south, urban policy must address the survival of the urban poor [13]. Low-income communities are now the majority in developing countries, with 60% of the population living below the poverty line U$2 per day [14].

Comprehensive upgrading programmes can confront the challenges of exponential population growth in contexts of limited economic resources. Understanding the intrinsic dynamics of population change is recognising the potentials of low-income communities and their real needs. Community-based initiatives and participative projects have shown multiple strengths, as well as efficiency of results to meet the specific needs of informal dwellers, thus, ensuring sustainability of improvements through sense of place and empowerment [6]. Increased participation of low-income communities in upgrading projects give rise to strategies which address the problem from a bottom-up perspective, transforming rigid schemes into adjustable structures, where the community becomes an important element of the process [15].

> *"The appropriate role of government would seem to minimise direct intervention, allowing the urban poor to find solution that they can afford in their traditional way"* [3].

An significant element in the transition from top-down approaches to participatory strategies is legitimacy, understood as the acknowledgment of the existence of the urban poor in the city and their right to citizenship, as well as their ability to become actors in urban development [16]. Although not completely comprehensive of the dimensions of poverty, this recognition as urban dwellers and citizens modifies the perception of policies, programmes and encourages participation in urban projects. Renewed citizenship provides slum dwellers *De facto* tenure [17], recognises their right to shelter and promotes self-help as the means for improving their own dwelling through incremental construction. However, the vision of John Turner [18], where self-help is the answer to the problem of slums is far from becoming a reality , since self-help imposes time and budget burdens on the poor, in addition to diverse limitations and setbacks regarding resources, the improvement of public spaces, urban infrastructure and mobility. These communities lack, in most cases, technical, financial and legal means for upgrading the built environment and connecting themselves to the city. Hence, support of government agencies in terms of funding, design and management is essential, in cooperation with the private sector and professionals, in order to promote holistic approaches [9], Additionally, government support must come with institutional changes and flexibility to manage the unforeseen factors associated to informal settlements. Advice and guidance to address the needs of the people solve local and context-specific problems, thus, encourages project replication and modifies measures to the evolving needs.

The research in the field of sustainable upgrading of informal settlements in developing countries exposes the main factors to address in order to formulate comprehensive upgrading programmes. Similarities in the foundation of programmes suggested that, although understanding the cultural context is essential to formulate integral strategies, the core constituents to promote sustainable upgrading are comparable and can be classified in terms of *Physical Development, Legitimacy, Social Development and Governance* [4]. Furthermore, these constituents can become the framework for the formulation of comprehensive upgrading programmes in the context of informal settlements.

4.1 Spatial improvement

Small-scale improvements have great impacts on the livelihood of the urban poor and empower them to organise and execute community-initiated projects via incremental construction of housing and public space. Basic infrastructure, combined with secure connection to public services, reduce the living costs for, which, at the same time, improves their socio-economic condition. Access to services promote the creation of on-site employment and local retail [1]. Urban mobility and physical accessibility allow spatial and structural relationships with the urban structure, while open spaces become social places for recreational, social and economic activities and provide opportunities to develop community cohesion [19].

SPATIAL IMPROVEMENT		
COMPONENT	ACTIONS	INSTRUMENTS
URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE	Water Sanitation Drainage Public lighting Waste disposal	In-Situ Community Work Partnerships for implementation Funding for infrastructure by municipalities Community Working Groups
MOBILITY & ACCESSIBILITY	Roads & Walkways Access to the city Restricted access for automobiles	Construction of roads and foothpaths Physical connection to urban transport systems Promotion of non-motorised transport modes Layout adjustment
PUBLIC SPACE	Urban renewal Social Facilities Housing improvement	Improvement of open spaces Incremental construction Training skills for local construction
URBAN ENVIRONMENT	Dwellings for essential relocation Elimination of hazards	Relocation near former settlement Reforestation Management and prevention

Figure 1: Spatial improvement [4].

Infrastructure and community facilities generate an overall improvement in the sense of place of the residents, which combined with increased incomes encourage incremental construction, consequent with the needs and resources of families [18].

4.2 Legitimacy

Legitimacy allows individuals and communities to become part of the formal city and encourages sense of place and participation. The urban poor understand their rights and obligations, as well as the opportunities and responsibilities in the development of communities.

The evolution of strategies in addressing informal settlements relies on the importance of legitimacy, since illegality hinders the possibilities for self-help, access to welfare, education and labour [14]. Upgrading programmes grant instant *De facto* tenure, eliminate the fear of eviction and mend the relation of the inhabitant with the city [17]. The degree of participation in decision-making processes, from planning to execution and supervision, legitimates the programme in the community and boost trust, as well as commitment from the city and the inhabitants [20].

LEGITIMACY		
COMPONENT	**ACTIONS**	**INSTRUMENTS**
TENURE	Occupation rights Property rights Land tenure	*De facto* tenure Collective ownership of land Education about civil rights
LEGALITY	Community-Based Organisations Financial support Assistance in Planning	Legitimation of CBO's Guidance providad by municipal agencies Legitimation of Incremental construction
PARTICIPATION & SENSE OF PLACE	Community leadership Private-Public partnerships Diversity of Stakeholders	Local committee Partnerships with other actors Shared project ownership Acknowledgement of social responsibilities

Figure 2:   Legitimacy [4].

A difference has to be made between legitimacy and legality [16]. Although legality is necessary for social development, legal tenure is neither a guarantee for legitimacy, nor for community participation. Legitimacy is an implicit agreement generated by understanding the programme, accompanied by the possibility to participate and influence decision-making [16]. Additionally, self-organisation is fundamental for securing the means to finance improvements and protect the most vulnerable population. Community cohesion and legitimacy are

encouraged through recognition of the ability of the poor to manage their own resources, grants them a renewed citizenship, which nourishes new partnerships with the municipality and the private sector [21].

4.3 Social development

Social development is a learning process where empowerment, social capital and community capacity foster further social and economic activities to support the development of communities.

Social development was the main component missing in former upgrading strategies, also the reason for the limited scope and success. While physical results are important for legitimacy, social development signifies an improvement in the socio-economic condition of the settlement. The isolation of the poor is not only a physical limitation, is also a problem of restricted access to opportunities, ignorance about their rights and negligence of the state. Building social capacity encourages integration to the society [22]. Partnerships, shared ownership, collective tenure and legitimacy generate networks and spread knowledge.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT		
COMPONENT	**ACTIONS**	**INSTRUMENTS**
EMPOWERMENT	Community commitment Local Associations Participation	Encouragement for self-organisation Integration to the formal society Education about democratic processes
SOCIAL CAPITAL	Social Services Local management and financing Community cohesion	Open spaces as stage of social activities Facilities for knowledge transfer Community saving funds
COMMUNITY CAPACITY	Social networks Economic Development Education and Training	Self-organisation for managerial capabilities Small-scale businesses Open spaces for economic development Community groups

Figure 3:   Social development [4].

The horizontal structure of networks demands open spaces for discussion and participative decision-making, mobilising the people towards integration and community cohesion [23]. Empowerment reduces vulnerabilities by supporting community-driven initiatives for physical, social and economic improvement. However, the strength of communities relies on the stability of organisations and legitimacy of actions. Community-based organisations build social capital, educate the people in participatory processes and provide working skills that

could be employed later in the development of other settlements or in the formal labour market.

4.4 Governance

Participative approaches demand the construction of city-wide networks to spread knowledge, otherwise improvements of informal settlements become isolated projects with restricted relevance in the overall development of the city.

Governments experienced a learning process with the past strategies, where they understood the limits of internationally driven initiatives along with rigid programme frameworks. Decentralisation is the institutional transformation, which allows the emergence of comprehensive upgrading programmes. Local authorities realised the need for institutional reorganisation in order to answer the call for empowerment. Moreover, self-organisation demands participative approaches for implementation and planning. Participation steers municipalities to innovate in policy and institutional structures, open to social networks and include diverse stakeholders in decision-making processes.

The urban poor need guidance and financing opportunities, as community organisations are not sufficient to overcome poverty, illegality and stigmatisation. The municipality provides funding and guidance in management, while the academy assists in planning, the private sector in partnership with government agencies and the community support implementation and sustainability.

GOVERNANCE		
COMPONENT	**ACTIONS**	**INSTRUMENTS**
INSTITUTIONAL RENOVATION	Decentralisation Institutional autonomy Institutional reorganisation	Encouragement of local initiatives Flexibility and Innovation Delegate responsibilities to local authorities
INTER-INSTITUTIONAL CO-OPERATION	Coordination of activities Partnerships Inclusion	Joint work between government agencies Diversity of stakeholders Economic motivation for inclusion of civil society Community participation in decision-making Guidances for CBO's in the conception of projects
INCLUSIVE DECISION-MAKING	Empowerment Government as enabler Renewed citizenship	Promotion of community-driven initiatives City-wide community development plan
INTEGRAL PLANNING	Mapping Prevention Project replication	City-wide comprehensive survey Projects as learning centres Pilot projects for promotion Comprehensive development plan for the city

Figure 4:   Governance [4].

4.5 Framework synthesis

The poor are as well part of the city, calling for inclusive development policies. Responding to the challenges of informal settlements relies on the formulation of integral development strategies at a city-wide scale encouraging social integration, especially in urbanised areas, where life quality decreases as low-income population expands.

	COMPONENT	ACTIONS	INSTRUMENTS
SPATIAL IMPROVEMENT	URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE MOBILITY & ACCESSIBILITY PUBLIC SPACE URBAN ENVIRONMENT	Public Services Waste Management Road Construction Public Transport Urban Renewal Community Facilities Incremental Construction	In-Situ participative design Partnerships for Implementation & Financing Guided Self-Help Incremental Construction
LEGITIMACY	TENURE LEGALITY PARTICIPATION	Property Rights *De Facto* Tenure CBO's Inclusion Assistance & Support Stakeholders Commitment PPP's	Collective Ownership Legal Tenure Legitimation of CBO's Guidance Shared Ownership Shared responsibilities
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT	EMPOWERMENT SOCIAL CAPITAL COMMUNITY CAPACITY	Participation Information Community Cohesion Self-Management Social Networks Education & Training	CBO's Knowledge Transfer Skill Training Small-Scale Improvement Local Economy
GOVERNANCE	INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATION INCLUSIVE DECISION-MAKING INTEGRAL PLANNING	Decentralisation Coordination Participation Enablement Citizenship Mapping Prevention Replication	Flexibility Innovation Reorganisation Diversity of Stakeholders Encouragement & support Community-driven initiatives Comprehensive Development

Figure 5:   Synthesis [4].

Spatial Improvement embraces the provision of urban infrastructure, improved mobility and accessibility through the improvement of roads, walkways and the built environment, which in turn would improve the quality of open spaces. These changes in the public realm encourage incremental construction of housing and an overall improvement in the built environment. In order to implement these spatial improvements programmes need to include communities, recognise the potentials of diverse stakeholders for planning and decision-making processes in urban upgrading

Legitimacy is an essential constituent for participation and encouragement of communities, promotes sense of place, and legitimises institutions, organisations

and associations. Legitimacy initiates learning processes and capacity building for both communities and municipal agencies, allows knowledge transfer through social networks, and generates new relationships between residents and the state.

Social development is both basis and outcome of sustainable development, a continuous cycle where empowerment, social capital and community capacity foster further social and economic activities.

Governance for the development of informal settlements brings together diverse sectors of society, involving low-income communities in the urban agenda. Participatory approaches demand social integration to avoid gentrification and isolation of projects. Communities need guidance and flexible regulatory frameworks, along with financing that supports community-driven initiatives.

These components can be used to create a flexible basis, an integral structure to support the definition of upgrading programmes in developing countries, address the diverse dimensions of informal settlements and allow adaptation of programmes to the context-specific conditions of each culture.

5 Conclusions

The components exposed above are some of the lessons learned from the previous research, which have been organised and integrated into a framework, where each constituent is defined by the main components. Actions and instruments for the implementation are suggested, revealing that the understanding of poverty leads to the identification of the real needs of low-income communities and the importance of including them in the upgrading planning process. Thus, the combination of the following components can be the basis for comprehensive slum upgrading programmes.

The framework proposed in the section above suggests a flexible structure for comprehensive upgrading programmes, however the participation component is yet to be defined and revealed in order to propose a programme structure which emphasises the importance of community participation in upgrading programmes and the instruments and modes to achieve a participatory approach.

The proposal of a framework aims to provide the planning tools to government agencies, as well as communities, transforming the idea of governments as single stakeholders. It has been observed the limited success of improvements and brittle impact of top-down upgrading strategies. Low commitment and absent sense of place weaken the effectiveness of measures, compromising the sustainability of outcomes and replication of projects.

Communities gradually understand the importance of participation in the development of their own environment; consequently, the state must recognise the potential and ability of community-based organisations to manage implement and maintain their neighbourhood, guided, and supported by every sector of society.

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