



HOUSING AS PROCESS: TOWARDS A MULTI- SECTORAL APPROACH TO URBAN POVERTY REDUCTION IN KHARTOUM

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The aim of this paper is to highlight the significance of housing as a strategic tool in addressing the multifaceted nature of urban poverty.

Approach: The paper utilises a literature review around the nature of urban poverty contrasting it with some of the prevailing assumptions around the urban poor and informal settlements in Khartoum. By emphasising the various socio-spatial manifestations of urban deprivation, it seeks to highlight some limitations in current approaches to measuring poverty and qualify current strategies for its eradication.

Findings: The paper establishes the relevance of housing, understood as a process surpassing the mere provision of houses, as a strategic front in addressing multidimensional poverty towards inclusive and sustainable urban development. It argues for reconceptualising the intellectual framework of housing policy to one that better responds to an expanded understanding of urban poverty and takes the urban poor into consideration as active agents of positive change.

Value: Bridging the gap between housing and strategies for urban poverty reduction, the paper is a contribution towards rethinking housing policy in Sudan.

Keywords: housing; urban poverty; socio-spatial justice.

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INTRODUCTION

The main aim of this paper is to highlight the significance of housing as a strategic tool in addressing the multifaceted nature of urban poverty towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

The paper utilises a literature review around the nature of urban poverty, contrasting it with some of the prevailing assumptions around the urban poor and informal settlements in Khartoum. By emphasising the various socio-spatial manifestations of urban deprivation, the paper will seek to highlight the pitfalls and limitations in current approaches to measuring poverty and qualify current strategies for its eradication.

URBAN POVERTY AND THE MDGs

The MDGs were initiated in 2002 by the United Nations Millennium Campaign, with the aim of inspiring and supporting people around the world to take action under eight key goals, namely

1. eradicating extreme hunger and poverty
2. achieving universal primary education
3. promoting gender equality and women's empowerment
4. reducing child mortality
5. improving maternal health
6. combating HIV/Aids, malaria and other diseases
7. ensuring environmental sustainability and
8. promoting global partnership for development.

The MDGs were able to galvanise global efforts over the last decade to support meeting the needs of the world's urban poor and marginalised. However, the UN MDGs Report 2014 (SOURCE) highlighted that while significant progress has been achieved at a global scale against the various MDGs, substantial efforts and actions are still required to address areas where minimal advancement was seen.

Looking at Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, Target 1.A was to halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day. This goal was indeed achieved globally, but disproportionately across countries and regions where extreme poverty prevails, with sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia lagging behind significantly. As reflected in much literature around the efficacy of the MDGs, the inability of whole regions to meet the 2015 targets is a result of unequal global growth and the focus on setting specific goals for international development that fail to acknowledge global disparities and contextual nuances and needs pertaining to poverty reduction (Clemens and Moss, 2005, p.3).

Further, when it comes to reduction of extreme poverty, the MDGs constrain the achievement of Target 1.A to reducing the number of people living below a specific income level, setting the poverty line at an earning of \$1 or less. Although setting a clear monetary figure for poverty facilitates its measurement at a global scale, the challenge it creates is a focus purely on income poverty, away from other forms of deprivation. Indeed, the majority of other goals have a direct bearing on both poverty and hunger. Lack of access to education, limited opportunities for women, high child mortality, poor maternal health, diseases, poor environmental conditions and lack of access to developmental opportunities, all have a direct bearing on the possibilities for poverty-alleviation and the ability of communities and their governments to work towards genuine transformation.

Beyond the MDGs, the setting of poverty lines in many countries has been the result of limitations in conceptions of poverty, and has resulted in the underestimation of deprivation in the majority of middle to lower-income countries. The next section attempts to highlight a few examples from various countries where income poverty perspectives have hindered the possibility of arriving at better-targeted strategies for poverty reduction.

POVERTY LINES AND THE UNDERESTIMATION OF DEPRIVATION

The International Institute for Environment and Development's series of working papers on urban poverty lines sheds light on the underestimation of urban poverty due to the setting of poverty lines. In addition to Satterthwaite's (2004) paper that looks at a broad cross-section of countries, the series covers India (Bapat, 2009; Chandrasekhar and Montgomery, 2012), Egypt (Sabry, 2009) and Zambia (Chibuye, 2011).

All papers address the problematic focus on only food needs and associated income in the estimation of poverty lines, and the problematic exclusion of non-food needs, or their limited consideration based only on existing expenditure rather than actual needs.

The authors point to the limited or absent consideration of changes in real prices over time, spatial differences in prices, and the under-sampling by official national surveys of the most-deprived of urban dwellers, who tend to be living in slums, and are hence largely regarded as 'illegal' and hence not to be accounted for.

Indeed, in their papers on urban poverty lines in India, Bapat (2009) and Chandrasekhar and Montgomery (2012) make reference to the limitations of focusing only on consumption of, and expenditure on, food needs, and how this overlooks the multiple compounding factors of urban poverty. While referring to the various non-food needs of the urban poor, the papers

focused mainly on housing needs and access to basic services. For the purposes of the study, Chandrasekhar and Montgomery (2012) referred to official surveys by India's National Sample Survey Organization, and highlighted the under-reporting of slums in those. They addressed the nature of housing in slums in terms of actual costs versus expenditure, concluding with suggestions as to how urban poverty lines would need to be adjusted to reflect housing needs.

Bapat's (2009) paper also looks at the under-estimation of urban poverty in India due to the setting of poverty lines, yet focuses on the city of Pune. Bapat (2009) points out that in addition to overlooking expenditure on non-food needs, poverty lines as they currently stand are based on calorie consumption and do not consider expenditure needs for nutritious food intake. She also highlights how economic growth in the city had almost no bearing on the lives of slum households given the multiple deprivations they face, such as "uncertainty, anxiety, ill health, stress, hardships and inconvenience" (6) and emphasises the importance of addressing those to assist the poor in their coping strategies.

In the case of Egypt, Sabry (2009) highlights similar challenges regarding the setting of poverty lines. With reference to the official Household Income, Expenditure and Consumption Survey (HIECS), Sabry (2009) draws attention to how many people living in the city's peripheries are unaccounted for with the city's sprawl and lack of clarity about its boundaries. She also points to the overlooking of intra-household distribution challenges, vulnerabilities due to working in the informal economy, the high costs of non-food needs in urban areas, and the disregarding of expenditure requirements for a healthy diet. Additionally, Sabry (2009) looks at the disregarded actual living costs in slums, and advocates for the importance of a multi-dimensional view of poverty that moves beyond income and consumption, and which reflects not only food-needs, but also non-food needs.

What is distinct about Sabry's (2009) study compared to the India papers is that it draws attention to the higher costs that the urban poor had to bear for even their food needs, in comparison to higher-income urban dwellers. Reasons for this include intra-city prices, dependence on daily instead of bulk purchases, and lack of storage and refrigeration.

Likewise, Chibuye's (2011) study of poverty lines in Zambia also addresses the prices of estimated food baskets in Zambia, with reference to data from the Living Conditions Monitoring Survey published by the government Central Statistics Office (CSO), and data by the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection in the form of surveys of a Basic Needs Basket (BNB) of essential food and non-food items. The comparison of JCTR's BNB against that of CSO revealed that the poverty line based on food items was set too low (JCTR's poverty line was set at \$2.2 per person per day, compared to \$0.45 by the CSO). Chibuye's (2011) paper also highlights that poverty lines did not cover for the actual expenditure on food by the urban food, which is higher than the average due (as in Egypt and India) to intra-city prices differences, the inability to purchase food in bulk, as well as expenditure on non-food needs.

In commenting on the dependence of the majority of studies on the income-poverty approach, Bapat (2009) elaborates that the approach

"...does not take into account the levels of asset ownership that determine the ability of households to face fluctuations in income. In using the household as the basic unit it also ignores the gender inequality and intra-household disparities in access, consumption and other entitlements. As each household is treated independently, all relational dimensions are missed and the high level of spatial and identity-based

social exclusion that the poor suffer is omitted. The poverty line approach excludes insights of the poor themselves on their deprivation. This self-perception is crucial for designing developmental intervention” (16 – 17).

Clearly, all authors of the above studies highlight the importance of setting poverty lines in ways that reflect both food and non-food needs and which take into account spatial differences, as well as the urban poor’s own perceptions of their deprivation and associated needs. They agree that definitions of poverty need to take into account non-income aspects, including asset bases, shelter needs and basic services, healthcare and education, as well as civil and political rights. The key premise of all the authors is that the difficulty in quantifying non-food housing and basic services needs should not be a reason for disregarding them. Further, the authors argue for broadening poverty definitions to incorporate people living in unhealthy and risky environments, given the effects that living in such environments could have in causing, protracting and sustaining poverty. Evidently, a multidimensional understanding of poverty is crucial if, as Satterthwaite (2004) points out, we are to “identify many more possibilities for poverty reduction and much expanded roles in poverty reduction for local governments, community organizations and local NGOs” (1).

Henceforth, what are the alternative directions for urban poverty alleviation that a multidimensional understanding of poverty points towards?

The next section deciphers the various dimensions of deprivation and how a broader definition of poverty can contribute better strategies for tackling urban development challenges.

SPATIAL INJUSTICE AND MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY

In a recent publication around urban poverty in the Global South, Satterthwaite and Mitlin (2013) addressed the multidimensional nature of urban poverty. Following the critique of current conceptions and ways of measuring poverty, they presented eight other aspects of deprivation that go beyond just income. Those are as follows (281):

- inadequate and often unstable income
- inadequate, unstable or risky asset base
- poor quality and often insecure, hazardous and overcrowded housing
- inadequate provision of ‘public’ infrastructure
- inadequate provision of basic services
- high prices paid for many necessities
- limited or no safety nets
- inadequate protection of rights through the operation of the law and
- voicelessness and powerlessness within political systems and bureaucratic structures.

The above non-income aspects of deprivation evidently converge towards questions around spatial justice. Lack of access to adequate housing, services and lack of access to public infrastructure are forms of deprivation beyond merely income that result from socio-spatial injustices. They in turn create further deprivation; without legal, serviced tenure in a convenient location that supports access to safety nets, asset bases become risky and economic and political entitlements are likely to be denied. Therefore, an alternative conception of poverty that takes into account the multiple dimensions of poverty, the centrality of spatial justice and the perceptions and needs of the poor is crucial for arriving at alternative, better targeted strategies for poverty alleviation.

Indeed, as Satterthwaite (2004) emphasises, some of the benefits of such a multidimensional view of poverty is that it provides more entry points for poverty reduction, acknowledges the agency of the poor and the importance of engaging them, and recognises the multiple roles that housing can have in urban poverty reduction.

Therefore, it could be argued that tackling socio-spatial injustices as they manifest in current approaches to urban planning and housing policies and provision for the poorest urban dwellers can offer new and alternative directions for poverty alleviation.

A review (Fiori et al., 2001; Mathey, 1992; Turner, 1977) of historic and current approaches to housing policies and provision across cities in the Global South points to the following two key assumptions that emanate from misconceptions around housing and urban poverty:

- Viewing the urban poor as a homogeneous group with similar needs and a limited role in the process of housing.
- Viewing housing as mere shelter and an end in itself for the urban poor, rather than a means towards a better life.

If housing is to support the transformative alleviation of deprivation for the majority urban poor, there is a pressing need to move away from those assumptions towards the reconceptualisation of the intellectual framework of housing policy to one that better responds to an expanded understanding of urban poverty and takes the heterogeneous group that is the urban poor into consideration as active agents of positive change.

In light of this paper's emphasis on Sudan, the next section presents an overview of housing policy in Khartoum, examining the ways in which the above assumptions have manifested within the country's 60 long years of various housing provisions.

HOUSING IN KHARTOUM: A REVIEW

The experiences of housing policy and provision in Khartoum have always been operating under intense pressure of huge demand. Sudan's capital, and its uncontested major urban centre, has been growing rapidly in population and size. This is partially due to high natural population increase but is, for the most part, fuelled by mass rural to urban migration. The pull of the city can be attributed to "geographically and socially uneven development and the concomitant depression of rural ecosystems and communities, the long civil war and armed conflicts, [and] natural disasters like drought and famine" (Eltayeb, 2003). Of the metropolis' population of nearly six million people, 40% are estimated to be internally displaced people (Assal, 2008). This entails special vulnerabilities on top of the overall economic poverty rates, with about "80% of households in Greater Khartoum classified as being of low-income" (Hamid and Elhassan, 2014, p.185).

Under such circumstances, what housing options are available for the urban poor? Hamid and Elhassan (2014) note that housing supply mechanisms in Khartoum state have evolved from a limited supply of about 2500 units of finished housing in the 1960s and 1970s, which was discontinued due to lack of funding, to **Sites and Services**. In this form, based on an eligibility criteria and a points system, the government provides serviced plots of land with highly subsidised access to water, electricity and sanitation, and the responsibility of building then falls upon the recipient. With the government owning the majority of city land, this was perceived as a cost effective method of granting access to a dwelling for a high number of the population. In practice, however, "this division of responsibilities is not often strictly adhered to especially by government agencies" (Hamid and Elhassan, 2014, p.189). The majority of households 'benefiting' from this scheme ended up with un-serviced

plots in peripheral locations where they had to rely on communal efforts to link to services, in addition to managing the design and construction of their own houses. Though to some those costs were affordable, the same hurdles have blocked 56% of plots allocated through this scheme from being developed (ibid.). Housing supply through sites and services was ultimately discontinued.

Another form of housing supply Hamid and Elhassan identify is **Core Housing**. In its attempts to influence the housing market, the Ministry of Planning and Infrastructure (then named the Ministry of Engineering Affairs) created the Housing and Development Fund; a ‘revolving fund’ that provides its services which cover plots, housing, infrastructure and social services to a wide spectrum of the population, but the urban poor in particular. “The method is based on massive construction in the urban outskirts, through soft credit repayable on a hire-purchase basis over 12 years” (UN Habitat, 2009, p.22). The so called ‘popular housing’ targeted at the urban poor is a fenced single room structure in addition to wet core (kitchen and toilet) which they can expand in accordance with their means and needs. Although this scheme has the advantages of providing beneficiaries with immediate housing to move into, and a mechanism of cross subsidies, where profits made of housing targeted at higher income groups can be used to support low-income housing, in practice it was unable to reach scale, providing an average of only 1961 units per annum between 2002 and 2008 (Hamid and Elhassan, 2014). As the construction is mostly carried out through private companies, whose profit interests can only be actualised through mass construction, the location of the schemes has been limited to remote areas outside the urban fabric where land is cheapest, rendering it more unattractive to the poor (UN Habitat, 2009).

Outside those forms of housing provision, the only option remaining is **Informal Housing**, which steps in to fill the huge gap between supply and demand in the housing market. It consists of ‘unauthorised’ housing on either public or private land that does not necessarily follow the building codes and regulations. Estimates indicate that in the year 1990 about 60% of Khartoum’s residents lived in informal settlements (Hamid, 1996, cited in Hamid and Elhassan, 2014). Eltayeb (2009) categorises those into inner city slum areas engulfed by urban expansion, outer slums and squatter settlements which he gives the distinction of illegal land occupation by newcomers. Official responses to informal housing include replanning and upgrading of highly consolidated slums within urban fabric, incorporation of outer slums and villages in direction of city growth and finally demolition and relocation to ‘peace villages’ at the outskirts of the city.

In light of the expanded understanding of the nature of urban poverty discussed above, two forms of limitations can be traced across the official forms of housing. Firstly, a recurring mismatch between the housing provision and the needs of the targeted urban poor. This predominantly applies to location, as “there is evidence that most of the beneficiaries prefer to remain in the city squatting, renting, or living in the camps rather than move to low-density neighbourhoods, [away from the city centre] which is the main goal of planning policies” (UN Habitat 2009, p.21). This preference can be attributed to the accessibility to sources of livelihoods and social support systems granted within those areas, which is compromised if the urban poor agree to relocate to remote peripheral locations. The mismatch between the provision and the needs of those targeted can also be noted in the housing units themselves. As Hamid and Elhassan (2014) have found in their survey of 222 households benefiting from the different schemes, “the initially built units were not suited to the family sizes of the targeted beneficiaries” (6), which can indicate that “in their drive to reduce the initial cost of the core unit, the housing authorities did not respect the prevailing social norms” (193).

Moreover, stories of such mismatch between the housing and the urban poor needs it aspires to meet can be traced in the unofficial names of some of the resettlement locations for informal settlements; such as Jabarona which translates to ‘they forced us’ and *Zagalona* ‘they threw us away’. The names, beyond being narrated histories of those incidents, also unravel the little involvement of the urban poor in the process aiming to provide them with housing. Even when the outcome is in favour of those relocated, names such as *Al-Hukooma Dagasat* ‘the government was fooled’ reveal the decision was not due to a consideration of the supposed beneficiaries’ input.

Secondly, accessing formal housing has not necessarily lead to improved living conditions for the targeted urban poor. Limited accessibility to services still has its toll even on those in ‘official’ housing, with 44.1% still getting water from water vendors, 49.1% lacking electrical connection and 61.1% using pit latrines due to lack of sewerage networks, according to Hamid and Elhassan’s (2014) survey findings. The results of such a planning approach were urban sprawl and ‘leapfrog’ development, which further disadvantaged those it was meant to benefit, as the urban poor became “segregated from development possibilities, with un-affordable services” (UN Habitat 2009, p.21).

This, in addition to lack of funding to carry out construction and lack of technical assistance in terms of house design, orientation, height, etc., leaves any potential difference in the living conditions depending, for the most part, on the capacities of the ‘beneficiaries’. It is not unheard of that people opt to sell their plots and move back to live in informal settlements.

In light of the limitations of current approaches to housing in Khartoum, what would an alternative framework for housing that emanates from a multidimensional understanding of poverty look like?

HOUSING: AN ALTERNATIVE FRAMEWORK

A reexamination of misconceptions within current frameworks of housing policy would necessitate a break away from assumptions around the urban poor and the meaning of housing. Such reexamination can serve as the first step in moving towards an alternative framework that overcomes current limitations in housing policy in Khartoum and similar contexts, and which utilises housing as a strategic tool for poverty alleviation and socio-spatial transformation.

Henceforth, the following two misconception need to be reconceptualised:

1. the urban poor from passive to active agents in city-making, through elaborating often dismissed manifestations of their agency and recognising the multiplicity of their experiences and
2. housing form a noun to a verb, expanding the limited perception of housing as houses, towards recognising it as a means towards better integrated and more just cities.

Acknowledging agency and recognising multiplicity

Within the framework of current housing provision, the urban poor remain conceptualised as a burden to the state that tries, with little success, to accommodate them. This dismisses the fact that the vast majority of the city is in fact accommodated, although poorly, by the urban poor with hardly any resources.

In order to arrive at a sound reconceptualisation of the urban poor, it is important to refocus attention to “the impracticality of state-based and the irrelevance of market-

based housing systems for lower-income people” (Turner 1996b, p.342). A quick look at the vast expanses of ‘unauthorised’ housing shaping cities in the Global South is telling of how people are actually the main drivers of urban growth, while planners struggle to catch up. Khartoum is no exception; while the different housing schemes and master plans continuously struggle to reach scale, the city’s rapid growth is unhindered. The politics of urban planning¹ in Khartoum has inarguably generated what Assal (2008) terms Khartoum’s ‘pathological’ urbanisation. As Babiker (2003) rightly points out, Khartoum is “perhaps the most over-planned city in the world” (18); none of its five master plans – the latest being the Khartoum Structural Plan 5 (KSP5) – have been implemented. Surely, Turner (1996a) argues that misconceptions of power which lead to associating it solely with financial and political authority create public–private dichotomies that dismiss the unmistakable agency of the urban poor.

Turner and Mangin demonstrated that over time and “*in favourable conditions*”, the poor could produce substantial, spacious and reasonably serviced homes.” (cited in Gilbert 1992, p.85) More significantly, they revealed that the “reaction of the poor to poverty was rational and that families recognised the most sensible ways of improving their living conditions” (ibid). Experiences have also shown that, by adopting realistic approaches to poverty reduction that are relevant to local circumstances and local capacities, the urban poor are increasingly able to make limited funds go a long way (Satterthwaite, 2002).

These debates do not suggest that the poor should be abandoned to deal with the condition of their poverty on their own limited means. They rather call for policies that foster conditions enabling them to be in control of decisions made around the design, construction and management of their housing. By involving the poor in the formulation of responses designed to accommodate their own lives; of which they are the experts, not only do the interventions become more inclusive, they also become increasingly efficient and sustainable.

By moving away from the conventional ways of viewing the urban poor and acknowledging them as heterogeneous and diverse groups with diverse needs, approaches adopted in addressing their housing ought to correspondently become just as diverse and should be grounded on “an understanding of context and group-specific poverty” (Fiori et al., 2001, p.17). For Mitlin (2011) “the need for diversity is related both to the multiple needs of the urban poor and to the heterogeneity of groups within the urban poor” (521).

A nuanced understanding of the nature of urban poverty necessarily recognises the co-dependencies that exist between the extremely vulnerable and the relatively better off poor. This is consistent with Hamid’s (1996) findings in regards to the livelihood patterns of displaced households in Khartoum, as 76% of the houses he surveyed indicated that sharing food with less fortunate neighbours was a frequent occurrence. He remarks that “even if a man does not have any money, he can still find a group of friends and neighbours who are willing to share ... in the expectation that, one day he will be able to return the favour” (234). The sense of community and collective spirit are significant across the social structure of the urban poor, but their importance is much greater for the more vulnerable groups as, for them, social ties are valuable assets since “the impacts of poverty can be reduced through strong and supportive social networks” (Mitlin, 2001, p.518).

¹Although stemming from an urban management approach, a useful critique of ‘The politics of urban planning in the Sudan’ is offered in Johan Post’s (1995) study, which points to a variety of problems that cover interrelated political, economic and cultural factors.

²Italics by author.

Indeed, through acknowledging agency and recognising multiplicity, the urban poor can be reconceptualised from a burden to an asset, and informal settlements from a problem to the first step towards a solution. Coupled with strategic resource allocation, such reconceptualisation can serve as a pathway towards transformative city regeneration and upgrading.

Understanding housing as process

The appropriateness of housing to its dweller goes far beyond the physical shelter. This is especially true in the case of the urban poor, as there are many factors that get dismissed when seeking to provide mass solutions to the housing issue, including but not limited to access to livelihood sources and supporting social systems. As previously discussed, housing produced by the urban poor, despite appearing as (and often actually being) inadequate, in fact acts as the basis for suitable shelter and a foundation from which a way out of poverty can be sought (Turner and Mangin cited in Gilbert 1992). This is due to the fact that it addresses the non-physical aspects of housing.

Hamid (1996) points to the significant role public policy plays in livelihood patterns for Khartoum's most vulnerable. He states that "the relocation of people from the settlements they had spontaneously built near places of employment to remote areas has had a detrimental impact on household survival, access to employment and daily expenditure (especially transportation costs)".

This can explain why a sectoral approach to housing, focusing solely on the provision of a plot or a core unit proved unattractive to the urban poor. Moser (1995) argues that despite increasing investments in urban development there's no guarantee that sectoral interventions significantly contribute to reducing poverty levels. While the poor individuals and households plan cross-sectorally, making continuous trade-offs between pressing priorities depending on "factors [such] as stages in individual and household life cycle, the relationship between needs of different household members (men and women, boys and girls), and between productive and reproductive work" (161), planning agencies that adopt a sectoral approach end up making assumptions about the poor's willingness to take part in their schemes, which can lead to their arbitrary nature and little social relevance.

By acknowledging the different priorities the urban poor are continuously negotiating, any concept of appropriate housing that holds relevance to the group it is targeting, rightfully extends beyond the central spatial concern of providing shelter to cater for factors such as access to social services and economic development prospects. A multi-sectoral approach to housing, combining multiple sectors and actors in incorporated projects, responds to the diverse aspects of poverty which, for the poor, are overlapping and inseparable. Indeed, "the immediate end of home and neighbourhood building is but a means to the further end of life and personal well-being" (Turner, 1996a, p.38).

Furthermore, a conventional understanding of housing not only focuses on "immediate housing needs of the poor while neglecting their other needs", it also falls short in addressing "the causes of poverty in the context of the city as a whole" (Fiori et al., 2001, p.26). In their review of the evolution of housing, Fiori et al. (2001) stress that as "perceptions of poverty and the role of the state are changing, so are views about housing, emphasising even more than before its multidimensional nature, its unavoidable articulation with urban development processes and its place in relation to economic and social policy" (28). At its heart, the quality of housing signifies "social integration of population groups divided by income, place of residence, access to services, opportunities and so forth." Such integration,

in turn, “depends fundamentally upon processes of participation, partnership and devolution which give diverse social groups the power to make decisions that influence their lives and environments” (19).

Housing then, moves from being defined as the mere provision of houses, to be understood as the process of restructuring power relations and redistributing resources, and its methods “as tools for social and institutional change – as means to further ends and not as ends in themselves” (Turner in Mathey, 1992, p.xiv).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR KHARTOUM

The question remains, how can housing policy practically address urban poverty? What are the characteristics of such a policy, and how can it be attained? Below we shall highlight some recommendations for the Khartoum context, which attempt to bridge the gap between housing policy and poverty reduction goals. Those recommendations will essentially stem from a reconceptualisation of the urban poor as a group and renewed understanding of housing as a process.

A new understanding of the urban poor in Khartoum

Participation of the urban poor in all stages of the housing process

It is imperative that the urban poor are involved in the process of determining their own housing. Decisions made around the form of the housing policy that is suitable for each group, its location, typology, etc., all must be made with those who will inhabit it.

Although Sudan’s National Comprehensive Plan states that “community must be included to decide upon planning priorities, plan implementation [and] housing project” (Government of Sudan, 1992 cited in Bahreldin and Ariga, 2010, p.8), in present state-initiated planning, the concept of participation is co-opted to legitimise pre-decided plans. “The process [of community participation] in the Sudanese capital region seems as if the government is taking advantage of people as a source of funds and cheap labour for projects without actually involv[ing] them in the decision making.” (Bahreldin and Ariga, 2010, p.8).

This can in part be attributed to the lack of institutional mechanisms to facilitate participation and the limited capacities of local governance bodies. Participation, however, is present culturally through the phenomenon of Nafeer; the traditional form of community led planning. Through institutionalising the Nafeer concept, with planners, the urban poor and policy makers all involved, it can be a critical tool in opening up channels for an otherwise non-existent conversation, out of which, not only a more suitable and effective form of housing can be achieved, but also a common understanding of the urban issues and means to address them can emerge.

Community-based housing provision

Recognising the importance of community ties for the urban poor, showcases how the individual provision of housing can threaten one of the major assets of the most vulnerable. For the lowest income groups, a lot of apparent advantages exist in keeping various income settlements, as “not only do they purchase the goods and services provided by the poor but they also enable cross-subsidy to take place.” (Mitlin, 2001, p.518). Housing should, in fact, aim to create a community in places where it does not yet exist. The incorporation of different groups within

the community in continuing activities helps with building social capital as well as reinforcing safety nets. As Eltahir (2005) points out, “local authorities should help in reducing tensions between community members themselves, and between them and their popular committee, which was created during replanning by encouraging communal meetings and organizing various activities that bring people together in an amicable atmosphere” (6). She argues that this “will improve people’s social capital, which will allow community members to participate willingly in communal projects” (ibid).

Furthermore, identifying especially vulnerable groups within the urban poor translates into a need for the “tailoring of policy and the targeting of resources and subsidies toward particularly vulnerable groups to ensure that they are not excluded from, or disadvantaged by, initiatives that seek to address the needs of a range of poor households that share the same settlement, neighbourhood, or city.” (Fiori et al., 2001, p.16).

A new understanding of the meaning of housing

Multisectorality in the actors and programmes of housing schemes

Fiori et al. (2001) introduce multisectorality “as the formulation and implementation of programmes and projects that simultaneously integrate the actions of many of the traditional sectors that have hitherto divided the work of public and private agencies” (17). The multiplicity of sectors involved in the process of housing complements a multidimensional understanding of urban deprivation such as inadequate shelter, limited access to social services like health and education, vulnerability to crime and insecure income. For the multisectorality at the project level to be sustained, however, it must be accompanied with multisectorality at the policy and institutional levels.

Housing programmes should not be limited to the housing authorities. Recent governance shifts in Khartoum administrative structures including the Ministry of Physical Planning and Public Utilities have included a move towards decentralisation. Although in theory decentralisation should have led to less bureaucracy, the actual outcome has been the isolation of ministerial departments, leading to growing institutional fragmentation. “Attacking Khartoum’s urban problems by sector has proved inadequate; there is a need to respond holistically to the complex nature of the urban problems identified” (UN Habitat, 2008, p.11). A housing scheme should include health, education and economic training programmes, that bring together various actors from different ministries and agencies working together within a unified spatial area with priorities defined by the targeted group. Such housing schemes would present themselves as multisectoral interventions that are flexible and which grant individuals and groups the ability to alternate between options to choose what is most beneficial and suitable to them (Mitlin, 2001).

CONCLUSION

This paper has sought to establish the relevance of housing, understood as a process surpassing the mere provision of houses, as a strategic front in addressing multidimensional poverty towards inclusive and sustainable urban development. It has argued for reconceptualising the intellectual framework of housing policy to one that better responds to an expanded understanding of urban poverty and takes the urban poor into consideration as active agents of positive change.

Indeed, as Turner (1996a) puts it,

“healthy societies depend on healthy, empowered local communities that build caring relationships among people and help us connect to a particular piece of the living earth with which our lives are intertwined. Such societies must be built through local-level action, household by household and community by community. Yet we have created an institutional and cultural context that disempowers the the local and makes such action difficult if not impossible” (39).

Housing, regarded as “the most powerful and universally available tool for building community” (ibid), is undoubtedly an instrument of great viability in addressing such deep dysfunction.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

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