

INTEGRATED STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT OF HOUSING CONDITIONS FOR POOR COMMUNITIES IN INNER CITIES

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ABSTRACT

In the past decades several approaches to Improvement of old residential areas in developing countries have been highlighted; strategies ranging from eradication, through tolerance, to glorification of spontaneous settlements have come and, at times gone, or persisted. Shortage of housing stock and an increase in the number of unauthorized settlements lacking adequate sanitary provisions are a common reality in developing countries. The parallel phenomenon of deterioration of the existing housing stock, particularly in the inner city areas of developing countries, has reached alarming proportions. Inaction in this field can only accelerate the process of decay, resulting in the loss of valuable assets and making the housing shortage even more serious. The structure of this paper reflects the complexity of the strategies needed for tackling the problem, together with the heavy financial commitments implied in programs of urban improvement have so far deterred Governments from initiating comprehensive schemes to preserve the existing housing stock. In addition, it is important to note that the cost of rehabilitating existing housing stock is considerably less than the cost of constructing new dwellings, and this is of special importance for developing countries with scarce financial resources.

KEYWORDS: Improvement - Strategies – Poor-Communities - Egypt – Inner-Cities

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1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most essential needs of people everywhere in the world is adequate housing. This is recognized by the United Nations, and is emphasized in its Istanbul Charter. Thus governments are encouraged to facilitate their citizens' acquisition of adequate shelter. This involves: protecting the rights of owners and tenants; ensuring that citizens of all classes have the opportunity to obtain satisfactory housing; and to induce the private sector to invest in this economic sector (thereby reducing government expenditure as well as overall costs of housing). Therefore, this paper will analyze the reasons why the existing housing stock has deteriorated and why Improvement can provide an important contribution to the improvement of housing arrangements for lower-income and middle-income groups in Egypt, and discusses the different mechanisms needed to initiate and guide Improvement processes. Finally, conclusions & lessons of this research are presented.

2. CAUSES OF DECAY OF THE EXISTING HOUSING STOCK

The quality of life in large urban centers of the world is based on the interaction between complex social, economic, political and physical factors. As a result, the decay of certain urban areas can be attributed to a variety of reasons, not only poor physical conditions. Generally speaking, inner-city areas contain the oldest structures and, above all, display the characteristics typical of lack of maintenance leading to the degeneration of the existing housing stock. [1] Thus, the Causes of decay could be summarized in the following:

2.1 The Absence or Inadequacy of Regular Maintenance

Inherent defects in the original construction, poor maintenance and poor construction, for example the use of substandard materials and building techniques, accelerates the process of decay [2].

2.2 Types And Changes Of Uses

Changes in the use of buildings, for example from residential to commercial or industrial uses; will, in most cases, accelerate the process of decay, especially if structural stresses for which the buildings have not been designed are generated.

2.3 Government Intervention

In some cases, maintenance and improvement programs are prohibited by law in areas designated as slums. In many developing countries, no appropriate agencies exist to undertake the repair and maintenance of old buildings, and in addition there is frequently no source of financing for repairs and maintenance.

2.4 The absence of legal requirements

The absence of legal requirements to meet specific standards for repairs to old buildings also contributes to decay.

3. IMPROVEMENT CONCEPTS

Two types of Improvement programs can be identified: the Improvement of buildings; and the integrated Improvement of areas or neighborhoods.

3.1 Improvement of Buildings

Housing stock in inner-city areas, in the strict sense, consists of dwelling units grouped in individual buildings. The acceptability of the housing accommodation provided by those dwelling units is a function of their initial quality and of the rate of maintenance, as shown in figure 1. A properly maintained unit will provide a fairly high level of housing accommodation for a considerable period, depending upon the initial

quality of the unit. The level of acceptable housing accommodation provided by a poorly maintained unit will decrease more rapidly [3].

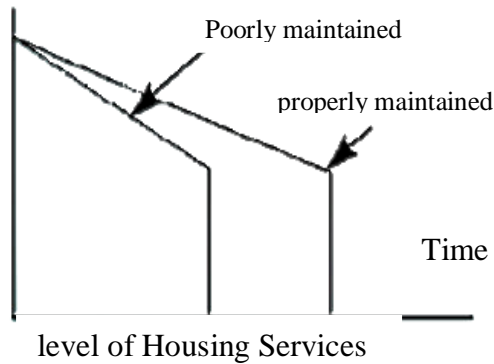


Fig.1. Rate of maintenance of buildings
Source: REFERENCES (2)

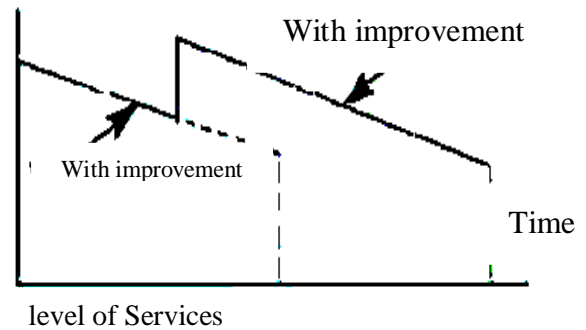


Fig.2. Improvement and level of Services
Source: REFERENCES (2)

The rehabilitation of an individual building generally has two different objectives. First, it can prevent dilapidation and/or prolong the life of the building, as shown in figure 2. By upgrading the building, it is possible to retard the process of decay and prolong the building's life span. Naturally, the number of years that can be added will vary according to the type of building, the type of rehabilitation undertaken and the ensuing rate of maintenance.

Secondly, the rehabilitation of individual buildings can aim primarily at improving the quality of the dwelling. Dwelling units can be generally improved with amenities such as the provision of running water and sanitary, a bath or a toilet unit, etc. That type of rehabilitation is implemented on a large scale in developed countries because of market forces and/or government intervention. In less developed countries, the emphasis is more on providing a minimal level of housing accommodation due to a lack of public funds.

3.2 Improvement of Areas

Although the Improvement of individual buildings is feasible and practiced in different countries, the housing stock in inner-city areas should not be considered as a collection of individual buildings. Individual buildings form part of streets, blocks and neighborhoods inhabited by communities. It is for this reason that emphasis should be placed on a broader concept of Improvement aimed at upgrading entire areas. Dwelling units which become substandard over a period of time are often inhabited by families in need of better education, employment, health care, etc., and providing those families with-improved dwellings, without ensuring access to additional opportunities, would be futile and self-deceiving [3].

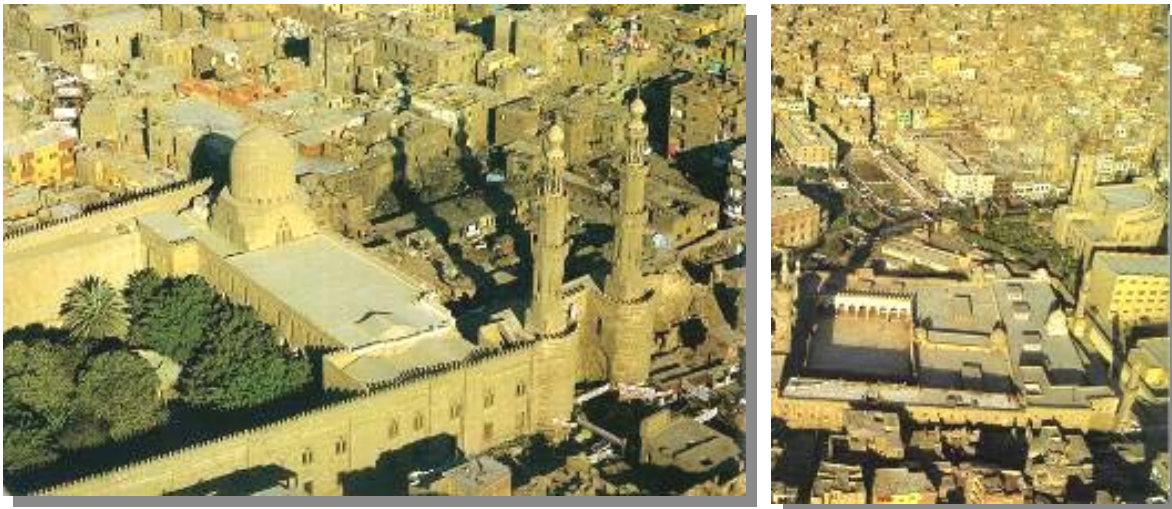


Fig.3. Illustrated the Current Situation of Old Urban Stock In Cairo

Source : REFERENCES (10)

4. COSTS AND BENEFITS OF IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMS

There are two points of view concerning the costs and benefits of Improvement. One is the narrow point of view, which only considers the return on investment to the investor. The other involves a broader concept encompassing costs and benefits to society as a

whole. Both of the approaches are important. The rate of return on investment is the main -if not the only -motive for the private owner to rehabilitate a building (whether owner-occupied or let), and since a large part of the housing stock is privately owned, the profit motive cannot be ignored. In fact, that motive should be well understood and exploited in the interests of society. The broader concept, often referred to as social costs and benefits, is important from the public sector's point of view, for obvious reasons [4]. Apart from the direct benefits of rental income and capital appreciation, a number of indirect benefits flow from any housing project:

- Improved new space and service facilities and health and social attitudes;
- Reduced risk of eviction and increased opportunities for capital formation;
- Saved cost of transportation and less disruption of social fabric.

Compared with those indirect benefits, which are mainly of concern to society as a whole, there is a similar set of indirect costs, including opportunity costs, connected with Improvement projects, for example:

- Increased rents for (poor) tenants and temporary extension of tenure only.
- Temporary displacement and (possible) loss of some dwellings;



Fig.4 Old subdivisions – Nasr City, Cairo.

Source: REFERENCES (11)



Fig.5. Old public housing – El Amiria district, Cairo.

Source: REFERENCES (11)

5. HOUSING IN EGYPT (CURRENT SITUATION OF OLD URBAN STOCK): -

Egypt's housing problem began to assume drastic proportions in the early 1960s. This phenomenon coincides with several others of the same period: the private sector increasingly tended to refrain from investing in housing; the population rose by high rates; the government's inability to meet popular demand for housing became noticeable. Published and unpublished Studies show that Egypt's housing crisis can be attributed to a combination of factors, which may be summarized accordingly, see for example [4]:

- The returns to investment in housing are lower than those pertaining to other economic sectors.
- The housing laws, being grounded in the political concerns of the 1960s, brought about a noticeable decrease in construction activity, particularly in housing for the middle-income groups.
- Egypt's inhabited area consists of only 4% of the country's area. This, coupled with the high rates of population increase, led to the increase in the prices of real estate and induced people to illegally build on agricultural land. This latter phenomenon involved approximately 60,000 faddans per year.



Fig. 6. The deterioration in urban stock of El Moaied Mosque area – Historic Cairo
REFERENCES (12).

- The costs, and therefore the prices, of housing units have progressively risen, putting these beyond the reach of the majority of citizens (who basically belong to the lower/middle socio-economic classes).

The combination of these factors caused the private sector to lose interest in the housing sector, thus forcing the government to address the pertinent problems on its own.

6. STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT OF THE EXISTING HOUSING STOCK

Although the rehabilitation of individual buildings is feasible and practiced in different countries, the housing stock in inner-city areas should not be considered as a collection of individual buildings. Individual buildings form part of streets, blocks and neighborhoods inhabited by communities. It is for this reason that emphasis should be placed on a broader concept of rehabilitation aimed at upgrading entire areas. Dwelling units which become substandard over a period of time are often inhabited by families in need of better education, employment, health care, etc., and providing those families with-improved dwellings, without at the same time ensuring access to additional opportunities, would be futile and self-deceiving.

6.1 The need for an area approach

Area approach deals with environmental and infrastructural deficiencies, and the successful upgrading of both the environment and infrastructure, is vital to the viability and success of Improvement programs. In addition, the diversity of existing standards should be recognized. The conditions of buildings and infrastructure in a given area are seldom homogeneous, and it is thus necessary to identify adequate standards for the various parts of the social and physical structure [5].

They can be brought into harmony only through an area approach. With regard to the need to undertake housing Improvement programs within broader redevelopment planning strategies, no specific physical area can be regarded as an optimal target area. In

each case, that area has to be determined in the light of functional and social homogeneity, which may justify treating particular sections of a city as a single urban unit. Residents will be disappointed and lose interest if certain issues, possibly of extreme relevance to them, cannot be dealt with because too narrow an approach is taken. The area-directed approach is a must, since interests will often clash, making trade-offs necessary in the process of participation. In order to formulate area plans, surveys are needed concerning users, owners, buildings and infrastructure, and their interrelationships.

6.2 Institutional arrangements for Improvement programs: -

In many developing countries a network of existing institutions has to be adapted in order to be able to handle the Improvement of the existing housing stock on the required scale. However, there may be many legal obstacles involved. At the national level, the ultimate responsibility for Improvement has to rest with the ministry that deals with housing, building and physical planning. However, a policy of Improvement cannot be affected without the co-operation of other ministries or of agencies not falling under the jurisdiction of the ministry of housing, building and physical planning. Mention can be made here of the national economic planning body, the ministry of finance and the ministry of the interior. Some kind of inter-ministerial consultation may be necessary, and the participation of institutions at lower levels will also often be useful - for instance, in the setting of definite targets concerning the number of houses to be rehabilitated. Building codes in many developing countries still have to be revised in order to bring them into line with available economic and financial means [6].

The adaptation of such codes should be a matter of high priority and can be done by grading standards into a number of classes, with the supervising agency probably having the authority to lower the standards when necessary. And there is need to adapt credit facilities to the needs of owner-occupiers in areas to be rehabilitated. Financial institutions, even if they have been specially founded to provide housing finance for low-

income groups, seldom have suitable schemes for people with very low incomes in areas to be rehabilitated. Improvement is a complicated process making demands on existing organizations that transcend those organizations' regular way of working. Improvement confronts different city departments with problems and situations that they are not used to handling. Technical and social problems are intermingled, and there is often considerable mistrust between residents and government bodies.

It is therefore advisable to consider the formation of project teams at the local level in which specialists from different agencies work together. In such a situation, the creation of a separate institution working at the municipal, provincial or national level has to be considered. Such an institution should promote participation, take care of surveys for the preparation and execution of plans and secure the co-operation of other agencies such as those responsible for the supply of water and electricity and saving and loan institutions.

6.3 Mobilization of Resources for Improvement Programs: -

The mobilization of technical resources should be backed up by the formulation of appropriate standards, economic specifications and codes of construction practice for housing Improvement; and by appropriate standards for ensuring or promoting structural safety, fire safety and health safety [7].

6.3.1 Needs Assessment

Repair and reconstruction programs for the Improvement of existing houses involve a number of complexities. Each project may have unique characteristics which have to be considered when appropriate materials, techniques, equipment, tools and skills are being selected for Improvement work. A list of existing buildings requiring Improvement is an important tool providing relevant technical data relating to design parameters, construction techniques and materials used. The records of the local authority must also be consulted, with a view to obtaining relevant information and data, since local

authorities are responsible for approving designs for buildings and houses submitted by the owners/designers of such buildings.

6.3.2 Materials mobilization

The scale of operation of Improvement projects needs to be established in order to facilitate the mobilization of technical resources well in advance of project operation. Most of the materials to be used in the Improvement of buildings are of the same type as originally used for construction. Traditional materials should be used for the Improvement of existing buildings and houses, wherever possible. In each housing Improvement project, appropriate construction techniques have to be adopted or improvised to meet specific requirements. Care must be taken to ensure safety, speed and economy in employing such construction techniques in Improvement projects. Preplanning is also required to determine the specific types of construction techniques which may be suitable for a given situation [8].

6.3.3 Capacity building

Great importance is attached to training, the main objectives of which are to bring skills up to required standards of knowledge and proficiency; to improve quality and efficiency in the execution of work; to increase productivity; and to promote economical construction and speedier execution of the job.

6.3.4 Tools and equipment

The Improvement of old buildings is an intricate operation. Besides common types of tools and equipment used in building work, special types of tools and equipment are often required to undertake specific jobs, and devices have to be improvised to meet the requirements of the local situation.

6.4 Mobilization of Financial Resources for Improvement Programs

The importance of finance for Improvement cannot be overemphasized, nor should it be forgotten that Improvement in fact generates new resources. It is therefore important to see how available funds can and should be used to mobilize additional financial resources. Two types of finance are involved in Improvement programs: institutional; and non-institutional. The distinction is important because of the different means by which these resources are mobilized. While institutional finance includes both private and public sector sources, non-institutional finance comes entirely from the private sector. As far as Improvement is concerned, it is that latter source which will undoubtedly play the major role in the longer term [9].

The public sector, nevertheless, can and should play an active role in mobilizing financial resources. By using some of its own limited funds it can create incentives for private-sector investment and thereby multiply the total amount of resources available. If market forces were allowed to operate, Improvement programs would need only guidelines and standards from the public sector, and financial resources would be provided entirely by existing or new owners. The result, however, might not be satisfactory, since present occupants might become homeless and structures of historical and other intangible value might be lost. It follows, therefore, that if the public sector intervenes in respect of rent levels, prices and environmental and other standards, it must also ensure financial support for the implementation of such guidelines.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Governments should devise housing Improvement programs within broader policies for comprehensive urban development. To this end, emphasis should be placed on the socio-economic revitalization of city areas affected by progressive decay and neglect resulting in the deterioration of the existing housing stock. Local Authorities should attempt to undertake Improvement measures at the neighborhood level rather than at the level of individual units. Small-scale, short-term interventions confined to a limited

number of units should however be encouraged in view of their inherent demonstrative potential, which may stimulate replication on a larger scale.

7.1 Institutionalization of Improvement programs

A necessary condition for successful institutionalization of Improvement programs and projects is the acceptance of the goals, means and scope of the program/project. The first step to secure this acceptance is to gain support for the policy objectives of development projects. Therefore, the objectives must reflect the interests of the beneficiaries. The people that are affected by the Improvement project should be involved in decision making. Using existing social institutions can do this.

7.2 Appropriate Local Partnerships

The Importance of appropriate Local Institutions and partnerships. Participation and partnership are at the center of the strategic approach to effective urban development. Whilst Improvement projects may take place with different actors and stakeholders participation with different levels of involvement, partnership implies a more equal distribution of responsibility (and benefit) amongst all partners. In order to develop and sustain partnerships on this basis, emphasis must be given to "empowering" and "enabling" all partners, especially those with the least access to power and resources such as low-income households and communities of urban heritage.

7.3 Adequate Financing System For Improvement Programs

The necessity of adequate financing system for Improvement programs. All Improvement projects need to be financed in some way. Problems have been confronted particularly with urban developments that are financially supported during their construction or early phases, often from sources external to the urban area in which the development is located, but which do not generate enough of their own finances or fall far beyond the means of the old city to operate and maintain over the medium and long

terms. Improvement should be designed appropriately with regard to the financial systems and capacities of cities.

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نحو إستراتيجية متكاملة لتطوير المناطق السكنية للمجتمعات الفقيرة داخل المدن في مصر

لقد أصبحت مشكلة تطوير و تحسين المناطق السكنية القديمة داخل هذه المدن من اكبر التحديات التي تواجه الإدارات الحكومية بمصر و الدول النامية على حد سواء، فعلى مدار العقود القليلة الماضية تم تطوير العديد من الاستراتيجيات لمواجهة هذه المشاكل المتزايدة و المرتبطة بطبيعة التغيرات الاجتماعية و الاقتصادية داخل المدن. يتطلب التغلب عليها تطوير استراتيجيات العمل و برامج التحسين و التطوير، وضرورة تفهم المخططين و المصممين الجوانب الكاملة لفعاليات السوق الرسمي و غير الرسمي، وكيفية تأثر الاستراتيجيات المقترحة على آليات العمل بالسوق، كما يتطلب ضرورة إيجاد صيغة متكاملة ومرنة للتعاون المشترك بين كل الجهات والفعاليات (حكومية أو غير حكومية) لمواجهة التدهور السريع لهذه المناطق و ما يترتب عن ذلك من تزايد مشاكل توفير الإسكان الملائم في المناطق الحضرية. وتهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى مناقشة الأبعاد المختلفة لظاهرة تدهور المناطق السكنية القديمة داخل المدن المصرية و تسليط الضوء على إستراتيجيات تحسين إسكان المجتمعات الفقير من خلال نظرة قطاعية متعددة للوصول إلى سياسات فعّالة وخطط وبرامج ومشاريع تهدّف نحو تحسين هذه المناطق السكنية المتدهورة كمدخل مناسب لحل مشكلة الإسكان بمصر.