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Background Paper for Working Group 2: Participatory Slum Upgrading

1. Introduction: Participatory Urban Slum Upgrading

Asia-Pacific is a vibrant region, with many countries undergoing rapid urbanization and economic transformations. Yet it also accounts for 60% of the world's urban slum dwellers. A few of Asia's megacities – such as Mumbai, Calcutta, Manila, and Bangkok – have over 10 million people, and between one-third and one-half of them live in slums. The rapidity and enormous volume of rural-to-urban migration further intensifies slum formation in cities and towns. In many developing countries in the region, there is a growing urgency to come up with creative and sustainable solutions to address the pressures of housing needs of the people who live in these resource-poor communities. This also requires a major change in mindset about how governments view 'slums' and 'slum-dwellers', from being a physical problem to their acceptance as an organic and integral part of any rapidly developing city, whereby slums should be seen more as the solution in that they provide potential, albeit below standard, shelter solutions at prices that the city workforce can better afford. This paper therefore proposes a key principle or philosophy in urban slum upgrading, that is, to emphasize the need to harness the social, economic, and physical potentials of these communities as an integral part of the society and the wider urban fabric, by putting people themselves, at the center of the development process and supporting them to improve their living conditions according to their needs and at a pace that they can afford i.e. Supporting the People's Process of Development.

What is the People's Process?

People's process can be defined as the development process whereby people are responsible for taking decisions regarding how they house themselves. In simple terms, development is about what people do for themselves to improve their lives. Therefore development is fundamentally based on the basic intelligence of people to respond to their needs and their 'creativity and

ingenuity' to meet these needs. People's desire to improve their lives is the driving force of development, whether it is in science, technology, arts or philosophy.

Remains and archaeological evidence of housing and settlements amply demonstrate that slums existed in medieval Europe, and were only gradually eradicated by the people who built those settlements with the skills that they had acquired over generations. These settlements also reveal that the resources that went into the creation of housing and settlements were obtained from the surrounding environment and in effect created in very organic forms. Evidence further tells us that people had established certain norms, standards and a mutual understanding of the community to create these settlements. This is what is recognized as the *people's process* of housing, an approach to urban and rural slum upgrading, tried and tested in many situations and in many countries under different stages of development. Evidence has also shown that when women are given the space to articulate their own need and priorities, and have the strength to negotiate them, power relation within the family and the community change. The support paradigm promotes gender equality by recognising the different needs of and benefits for both men and women.

2. Major Initiatives on the People's Process in the Asia-Pacific Region

Asia has many successful examples of participatory slum improvement or upgrading. Governments largely adopt a facilitative role in getting things moving, while maintaining financial accountability and adherence to quality norms. Community and civil society movements in Asia are strong and have gained ground in many Asian cities as a result of efforts by UN-HABITAT, and NGOs such as the Asian Coalition of Housing Rights and Slum Dwellers International, among others. Through these, community-led housing development processes are being promoted in Thailand, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Cambodia, Indonesia, Mongolia and others.

Asia has also witnessed that while the private sector is able to meet the housing requirement of the rich, the "people sector" has been able to cater to the poor. Social policy for meeting the needs of the poor is crucial as the relatively more developed countries in Asia – Singapore, Republic of Korea, and Malaysia – have demonstrated. When state and civil society come together, as in Thailand, a large number of people can improve their lives. As more cities in Asia adapt these practices and improve the housing situation of the masses, the goals of making cities productive and inclusive will likely be achieved.

UN-Habitat has built community capacity in Bangladesh, through the Local Partnership for Urban Poverty Alleviation Project that aimed to eradicate urban poverty amongst poorest communities in selected cities and towns. The basic premise is that the poverty alleviation is the responsibility of empowered urban poor communities, backed up by government supportive efforts and policies at local and national levels. In its initial phase from 2000-2007 the Project has reached out to over 600 under-served communities covering over 650,000 people in the 11

project cities and towns. The present phase of the project aims to cover 3 million people in 30 cities and towns in Bangladesh.

In Mongolia, UN-Habitat through funding from Cities Alliance and the Government of Japan has likewise assisted the citywide pro-poor upgrading of the Ger areas, through a structured consultative process involving communities, local and national government agencies, private sector and civil society.

The Kirtipur Housing Project in Kathmandu, the resettlements of slum dwellers in Mumbai, the Baan Mankong Programme in Thailand and the Million Houses Programme in Sri Lanka are all successful examples of placing communities at the centre of slum improvement.

These programmes suggest that a citywide slum upgrading approach is more effective than a project based approach of improvement of a few slums. The Slum Networking programme of Ahmedabad, India, is one such integrated programme envisaged to cover all the slums in the city. It was conceived as a pilot project with four main stakeholders joining as partners – the slum community, a private organization, Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation and an NGO. The corporation acted as the facilitator and the NGO looked after community mobilization and development. The Baan Mankong programme in Thailand is now a nation-wide programme.

These programmes aim at an integrated upgrading of the entire city using slums, not as isolated islands, but as an urban net. The spatial spread of slums over a city, together with contiguity between slum settlements, gives an opportunity to strengthen city level infrastructure networks. The projects indicate that the slum fabric can be used effectively to move from community scale to city level implementation. They also demonstrate that complex and large-scale urban renewal programmes can be sensitively executed. The key to the success is the slum dwellers themselves, who show that they are willing to mobilize resources despite their poverty. They have partnered with government agencies, including local government, NGOs, including women's NGOs and local professionals. Slum Networking is a bottom-up approach primarily under community control.

3. Methods in supporting people's process to slum upgrading

Experience tells us that the optimum results of the people's process can be achieved when the process is actively supported by the authorities. Over the last two decades UN-HABITAT has developed a systematic method of supporting the people to carry out their own development, which includes community mobilization, community organization, community action planning, community contracting, community savings and credit and community monitoring. This is a very systematic process that facilitates community empowerment, capacity-building of local authorities, and the dialogue between the two actors. The next section will discuss in depth the innovation of the community contract system, which was introduced in a number of UN-Habitat projects in developing countries in Asia and Africa in the 1990s starting from Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Namibia and South Africa. In Afghanistan, where UN-Habitat has worked for the

past 17 years, community contract is a core pillar of the work in empowering community institutions and widening their options to engage in socially meaningful and economically productive activities. Women and youth in both urban and rural communities were given the space to articulate and engage in sustainable programmes that radically improved their socio-economic situations in society. The key point to emphasize is that community empowerment is a starting point for peace, security and development.

Community Contract System

UN-Habitat promotes community contracts within the framework of the Community Action Planning (CAP) Approach, a systematic way of working with communities. A community contract is a contract awarded to the community organization by a government agency or a NGO to carry out physical works that have been identified in the Community Action Plan. It emerges from the process of communities identifying and prioritizing their problems and agreeing on plans to be realized. The works usually cover construction of houses and small-scale community infrastructure. If infrastructure or housing is built through conventional contracts the community benefits only from the output of the contract and not from the process of construction. Awarding the contract to the community has the advantages outlined in the table below.

Table 1 Comparative Advantages of Community Contracts

Process	Conventional Contract	Community Contract
Governance	Top down, no participation	Good governance through community participation
Planning	Outside professionals	Community
Design	Outside professionals	Community assisted by professionals
Physical works	Outside contractor	Community
Labour	Machine intensive	Labour intensive
Experience	Goes out of community	Stays within community
Quality of work	Chances of being inferior	Good, it’s their own
Profit margin	High	Low
Feeling of ownership	None	Very High

From 2002 to 2006, UN-Habitat has facilitated the issuance of more than 5,850 community contracts with a volume of US\$137 million in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Maldives and Sri Lanka.

Role of Local and Central Authorities

It should be stressed that formal authorities at the local and central level are best placed to take the lead through proper settlement and urban planning to anticipate urban growth and direct it in the proper direction to avoid development on hazard prone areas. Left totally to itself, un-aided people-centred creation of informal settlements are likely to end up in precarious and environmentally fragile areas, and will end up to cost much more in upgrading than settlements that are properly located within or at the extensions of existing settlements and on developable land.

Political will is needed to promote initial proper technical site selection and settlement structure planning, and should be seen as a strategic intervention that would set the proper basis for sustainable settlement development. The development of the dwellings by all means could be handed over to a people's process. In some cases where land is scarce and high densities are encouraged, it might be argued that walk-up apartments are needed – in this case there will be need for a bit more sophistication in the construction process that necessitates the use of architects and engineers for the design and construction of such buildings. The debate between high-rise, high-density development versus low-rise urban sprawl is an important parameter for consideration in this regard. Consultative, collaborative approaches to human settlements development ensure a high level of good governance and sustainable development.

4. The Way Forward: Some Recommendations for APMCHUD 2010

Scaling-up of Participatory Urban Slum Upgrading

City-wide slum upgrading is a key approach for scaling up efforts in the upgrading informal settlements. There is a need to move from pilot projects to full-scale programmes that would emphasize the enabling role of local governments. Local governance that embraces both protection and empowerment, providing the space for people to participate meaningfully, is needed to institutionalize efforts beyond community initiatives. This city-wide approach is being undertaken in various countries, most recently in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Mongolia and Thailand. Other requisites for scaling up are changes in mindset, improved policy frameworks, and streamlined administrative systems and procedures.

Attitudinal Changes

Firstly, decision makers have to intrinsically *trust* the people. The fundamental desire of a family is to get themselves out of their situation. The honour and dignity of the family cannot be questioned especially in the circumstances they are in. Secondly, *recognize* people's organizations and their capacities. The underlying premise is that they do have the *capacity* to overcome the situation that they are in. Recognize that answers to the problems are with the

people and the role of the external agents is to facilitate a process of *realization* and *actions* to deal with them. The recognition would naturally lead to strengthening mutual respects and dialogue. Professionals in this situation have to change from being “prescriptive” professionals to “support” professionals. Thirdly, *cultivate* a spirit of solidarity and community cohesiveness. Authorities should accept that *responsibility* for recovery and reconstruction upgrading their own dwellings rests with the families and the communities and that their role is to support the affected to achieve that.

Policy Changes

There is a need for the adoption of people’s process as a development approach in general, and especially to slum upgrading and sustainable urban development more generally. From the experiences in recent times, it is evident that national governments need to adopt the people’s process as the *mainstream process of development and reconstruction*. The development gains of mainstreaming people’s process are huge, and therefore, concerted efforts need to be made in this direction through systematic policy dialogue and reform. Within the development context as well as in natural disasters and post-conflict situations, the policy for housing people requires consistency, uniformity and equity in terms of application across the targeted areas.

It has been witnessed very often that, marginalized and vulnerable groups like the landless, woman-headed households and renters get left behind in development and reconstruction programmes. Therefore it is of paramount importance to ensure the protection of the affected and their right to a “place to live” is guaranteed. The centralization of authority for decision making tends to paralyze the decision making authority at the local level. Though they are necessary for application of a uniform policy and for coordination, such authorities should implement a decentralised development and reconstruction process. To address the needs of the people at a scale that is required necessitates the devolution of decision making to the point of action.

Systemic Changes in the Administration of Governments and Donors

To implement a participatory slum upgrading at a scale, authorities have to necessarily change from control to a facilitating framework. Designing control systems are easy; professionals and bureaucrats are familiar with these. Designing facilitating systems, on the other hand are difficult. For example, channelling funds directly to the people is beyond the rules and regulations of Governments and donors. Trying to be innovative within the rules and regulations, they would invent different packages like standardized material packages, purchase vouchers, smart cards etc. which stifle the flexibility that a beneficiary would otherwise enjoy with cash in hand. In attempting to design a system of assistance, it is very well known how Governments and donors struggle with standards, costs and how to spread the resources available equitably.

Debates abound on issues such as higher standards for few or a basic standard for all. The principle that should guide the process of design is to generate a process that would allow every family in need to build a basic house that can be improved incrementally.

In the case of post-conflict and post-disaster reconstruction, for instance, an important aspect that has to be considered in the design of the system is to ensure that the reconstruction investment remains with the community as much as possible. Past experience has also thought us that horizontal expansion of the programme through affected communities mobilizing and training other affected communities is an effective means of speeding up reconstruction. As can be expected, the technical human resources available for a massive slum upgrading programme are not available in most situations. In such situations, people to people learning and undertaking reconstruction has to be organized by the authorities. This creates a rapid ripple effect in the reconstruction process.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be argued that the people's process to slum upgrading with the provision of 'active support' can house people to their satisfaction, it makes more economic sense and produces more organic and locally-suited settlements. For the full realization of the potential of the people's process, it requires sensitive and active support from the authorities in terms of recognition, removal of legal impediments, technical and financial assistance.

Social Benefits

The people's process of housing and settlement development gives greater satisfaction to the people by the mere fact that it allows them to take their own decisions and be responsible for those decisions. This identity and recognition elevates people to higher levels socially. The catalytic effect of upward social mobility increases economic opportunities. The transformation of being an illegal to a legal citizen empowers people to become responsible citizens. The only requisite is for government authorities to believe and intrinsically trust in people, to give them the support to determine their own development.

Economic Benefits

Economic benefits of people's process are numerous. It enables communities to maximize the benefits of investments in housing and slum upgrading. People can produce their own investment in housing, coming from their own savings, from relations, networks and their own hard labor, which form a solid capital formation. It effectively generates small economic activities at the local level, benefitting the small entrepreneurs and semi-skilled and unskilled labor. What government can do is to provide access to affordable credit, so they will have the

confidence that they are bankable, and acquire the necessary condition to catalyze people's own investments. Investment costs for the authorities can be lower too.

Better Urban Forms

Today's cities can be called massive construction sites. There seems to be construction going on everywhere one would look. A settlement where people have the freedom to build would always look like a construction site therefore it may not look "pretty" from outside. However, the concept of a "finished" house for a family is when they can move in and occupy. They would keep on changing, decorating, adding to the "finished" house as and when they can afford and when family circumstances change. This gives a unique form the settlements produced by the people: no two houses will look the same. This makes much more pleasant organic urban forms rather than the drab uniform contract-built housing.

Good governance

Providing mechanisms and space for communities to participate in the decision-making processes and the development and implementation of improvements of their dwellings and the way their communities develop in response to their needs is an integral part of good local governance. This ensures ownership and sustainability of human settlements.