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Urban public housing strategies in developing countries: whence and whither paradigms, policies, programmes and projects

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Universally, the production, maintenance and management of housing have been, and continue to be, market-based activities. Nevertheless, since the mid-twentieth century virtually all governments, socialist and liberal alike, have perceived the need to intervene in urban housing markets in support of low-income households who are denied access to the established (private sec-

This paper examines the range of strategic policy alternatives, employed by state housing agencies to this end. They range from public sector entry into the urban housing market through the direct construction of ('conventional') 'public housing' that is let or transferred

consumers of urban housing, and to the administration of ('non-conventional') programmes of social, technical and legislative supports that enable the production, maintenance and management of socially acceptable housing at prices and costs that are affordable to low-income urban households and communities. It concludes with a brief review of the direction that public housing policies have been taking at the start of the -
ing a distinction between 'public housing' and 'social housing' strategies.

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1. Introduction

It is only over the last six decades that governments have assumed any responsibility for the production of housing for their citizens. Prior to the mid twentieth century –the 1950s-, government housing production

military and some public sector civic employees, for the periods during which they were in government service in a particular locality.

Housing production was clearly seen as an engineering function and so, for civil staff, public housing production was the responsibility, and a minor activity of departments or ministries of public works. Its manage-

administration of allocation procedures. Governments' intervention in the housing provision of the vast ma-

private sector initiative in the interests of public health, safety and amenity by imposing standards that many low-income households could not afford to meet, and many city governments could not enforce.

In addition, in several countries, attempts were made to increase the supply of housing affordable to lower income groups and limit the extent of exploitation by private sector landlords; governments imposed rent controls on urban property. However in many cases, rent controls rendered the supply and maintenance of urban housing commercially uneconomic, leading to its abandonment and/or deterioration. In some countries, notably in South Asia, governments attempted to im-

pose a limit on the number of urban properties that any landlord was allowed to own¹.

As a consequence of increasing urban homelessness and the growth of slums, from the 1950s governments, throughout the world, started to intervene more directly in the procurement of urban housing by establishing housing authorities, departments or ministries or extending the mandates of ministries of works to embrace the formulation and implementation of new policies and strategies for the production of dwellings.

Over time the political and operational bases for public housing developed and took on wider objectives than simply the production of residential accommodation. Thus, the second half of the twentieth century was characterised by the design, development, testing and institutionalising of alternative strategies for public sector engagement and, in some cases, control of the production, maintenance and management of urban housing; explicitly engaging wider issues of social development of which the construction of dwellings and management of environmental infrastructure was but a component.

These approaches are reviewed in the subsequent sections of this paper, concluding with a brief analysis of the 'state of play' at the beginning of the twenty

in the apparently coherent progression of policies and strategies, and some indications of the way ahead.

1. Ceiling on urban property legislation in India and Sri Lanka

have a negative impact.

low-income households, however, cannot afford to be located at distances far from centres of casual employment or outlets for low-skilled enterprise and are therefore dependent on securing affordable accommodation in city-centre locations, such as are provided by abandoned buildings or squatting on road reservations, street side-walks and pavements.

In many cities, the demand, very often by the poorest of the urban poor, for city centre accommodation, has led to an often iniquitous informal market in high density (and usually high-rise) shelter provision. In towns and cities that have a sizable stock of abandoned or under-

squatted by informal real estate entrepreneurs who rent or sell rooms to poor households is particularly common in the older cities of South Asia and the Middle East and North Africa.

This has also led to the informal/illegal construction of multi-story blocks of small apartments and single rooms, often of dangerously low standards of construction that are rented to poor households, often built on the sites of demolished low-density, former upper-income group residential properties or land that has not been developed because it is geologically unstable (Wakely & Abdul-Wahab 2010; Simms 2010)

2.3 Incremental development of informal settlements

An important characteristic of both these informal development processes is the incremental nature of house building, infrastructure installation and provision of urban services. Householders construct, extend and improve their dwellings when these become high priorities for the investment of their resources and energy and when disposable resources become available to them. This incremental process may take several years to accomplish during which many informal settlements remain in a 'half-developed' state that typically is aesthetically offensive to much of the formal establishment that tends to refer to

pejorative physical and social characteristics

affordable housing when and where they need it². It is also important in building social capital (community cohesion and local governance and management capacities in otherwise socially disparate new urban communities) through the incremental development of locally controlled and managed neighbourhood infrastructure, services and amenities as well as the construction and improvement of individual dwellings

2.4 SWOT Analysis of costs and benefits of informal urban housing processes

Table 2.1:

	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
for Occupant Households and Communities	Affordable, socially acceptable quantities in acceptable locations	No secure title and threat of eviction, causing reluctance to improve properties and neighbourhoods	Formal recognition on terms that allow security of title and the impetus to invest in housing and neighbourhood development	Inappropriate government policies that remove market advantages of informality, forcing low-income households into higher densities (overcrowding) and/or untenable locations
for City Government and Administration	Low-income group housing and neighbourhoods developed at negligible capital cost to government;	Non-compliance with planning (zoning) and building standards, occasionally leading to threats to public health and safety; high infrastructure maintenance costs	An experienced proactive resource for the management of low-income group housing procurement throughout the city; contributor to municipal revenue	Organised crime will take a stronger hold on informal markets preventing progressive initiatives to regularise them, leading to their increase
for City Society and Economy	Accommodation for the city's labour force, and for down-stream production that feeds formal industry and commerce, at no cost to government.	Perceptions of social and environmental degradation; fear of social instability.	The valorisation of property and the development of stable lower middle-income neighbourhoods and enterprises; contributions to municipal revenue.	Lack of appropriate policies will lead to the creation of slums, the deterioration of health and education and lowering of productivity and social unrest.

3. Construction of 'conventional' public housing - the public works tradition

The two decades 1950-1970 saw the political independence of many former European colonies in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean and a new economic inde-

ent Asian Countries, anxious to be perceived as 'progressive' and 'modern' by their electorate and internationally set in train programmes for the clearance of 'unsightly and unhealthy urban slums' that tended to include all urban informal settlements and the construction of impressive 'modern' apartment blocks and housing estates resembling those of the recent post-war reconstruction of European cities, employing all the tenets of the then fashionable functionalism of the Modern Movement in architecture that offered a good vehicle for such gestures (Wakely 1988).

public housing policies and set up public housing authorities in the same period. African governments started to intervene in urban housing markets soon after their political independence from colonialism in the late 1950s and 1960s, though generally not on the same ambitious scale as their Asian and Latin American counterparts. For in-

ed a national Ministry of Lands and Settlement though the procurement of subsidised urban housing was made the

- responsibility of municipal government in the major cities. Similarly in Nigeria the clearance of slums and delivery of public housing was the responsibility of local government or local-level parastatal development authorities, such as the famous and ambitious Lagos Executive Development Board.

and managerial resources that few public housing programmes were able to meet their ambitious construction targets. In many countries, other sectors of the economy, such as import-substitution industrial development and national distribution networks, became higher political

4. Support & non-conventional housing strategies

The Apparent inability of public housing agencies to meet targets for the construction of subsidised 'conventional' public housing and to maintain them in use was to search for ways to reduce construction costs and to off-load responsibility for the maintenance and management of public housing and latterly to link access to housing more directly with wider social policies for urban poverty reduction and the alleviation of its social impact. This and the extent of the proliferation of informal settlements, revealed by the 1971 round of national population censuses, in virtually all cities of the developing world.

es of the urban poor: an existing resource that might be exploited to advantage by government housing authorities, was brought to the attention of governments and the international aid donor community, notably the World Bank, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Regional Development Banks and European and North American bilateral aid agencies, in a paper by John

published by the United Nations in 1967(Turner 1968), and expanded upon later in Turner's book 'Housing by People' (Turner 1976).

Thus, in the early 1970s a 'non-conventional' social hous-

the construction, maintenance and management of public housing, often referred to as 'self-help' was introduced in the housing policies of many countries, alongside the construction of 'conventional' public housing that was rarely, if ever, abandoned altogether by developing country governments or municipalities.

This change in paradigm and policies coincided with the proliferation of urban non-governmental organisations

than reduce it. Also the quality of the end product was

er 1968), persuasively argued that informal settlements

shifted to one in which public sector housing authorities and agencies explicitly provided technical, managerial

and communities to house themselves – i.e. emulating the informal housing processes, outlined in Section 2 above, though improving the quality, safety and ame-

maintenance and management of housing to almost all aspects of urban social and economic development, as

5. The return to a new generation of 'conventional' housing strategies & incentives to private sector housing markets

The last decades of the Twentieth Century saw a distinctive change in paradigm, away from 'non-conventional' participatory approaches to low-income housing production and the re-emergence of government-sponsored and/or government-built public housing for urban low-income groups. As pointed out above, in the 19870s-'80s, when the 'non-conventional' paradigm (sites and services and slum upgrading) was adopted as the preferred policy option for urban low-income housing procurement, many government housing authorities continued, to undertake or sub-contract the construction of 'conventional' ready-built public housing for rent and/or sale at subsidised rates to low-income households, in many instances only on a relatively small scale.

In other cases, the construction of 'conventional' public 'conventional' sites and services projects and slum upgrading programmes being treated as 'one-off', extra-ordinary, interventions. Therefore, the mind-set and operational systems were largely in place to revert to 'conventional' public housing production in the 1980s and '90s. This was frequently accompanied by new programmes for the disbursement of housing grants directly to low-income would-be homeowners in order to assist them in gaining access to the formal private sector housing market.

For instance, the South African ' Finance Linked Individual Subsidy Programme' (FLISP), launched in 1997 as part of the national government's 'Integrated Residential Development Programme (IRDP)' made lump-sum grants of US\$5,000 (R54,238) available to low-income⁶ buyer-or- builder-households, who were eligible for a commercial mortgage or housing loan (by a bank), but could not afford it or were unable to obtain recognised collateral or guarantees, to buy or build a house in a development

has led to under investment in urban infrastructure and service provision in new municipally-approved low-middle-income housing developments by private sector developers and contractors (Fiori, et al, 2014).

The new generation of 'Conventional' housing strategies, ties for government support to the housing sector, giving

greater emphasis to the upper end of the low-income scale, rather than to the poorest urban households or those in greatest need. They are more concerned with the impact of housing markets and the construction industry on growth in national and municipal economies than with the social role of secure housing in the alleviation and reduction of poverty, though, of course, these can have a growth (Tibajuka 2009).

6. in the income category US\$320-645 of (R3,500-7,000) per month, raised in 2012 to \$320-1,385 (R3,500-15,000) per month(RSA 2012).

7. For example, Mexico, Chile, Brazil and Sri Lanka, all of which had major 'non-conventional housing policies and programmes with strong social objectives in the 1970s and '80s.

6. Where next

Clearly the way forward lies neither exclusively in the

8. -
tional' incremental urban housing (sites and services or slum-

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