SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE & MANAGEMENT
of
URBAN HOUSING
&
LOCAL ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

This paper discusses community participation dynamics in urban areas using case studies and highlights its role and that is played by external support agencies in different social, cultural and political conditions in the planning and management of low-income group urban neighbourhoods and their improvement and the maintenance of their domestic environment and services, as well as that of the lives and livelihoods of their occupants, within the prevailing theoretical policy context of democracy and subsidiarity.

Key Words/terms*: Community | Participation | Devolution | Local Governance | poverty | empowerment | powerlessness| Capacity Building*

Community participation and the engagement of urban low-income households in the planning and management of their neighbourhoods and the improvement and maintenance of their domestic environment and services are now firmly lodged in the international rhetoric of urban poverty alleviation and slum improvement, under the general banner of 'good governance'[2]. Almost invariably it is sweepingly assumed that the inhabitants of urban low-income neighbourhoods are members of long-standing and permanent community organisations that are well organised and capable of making collective decisions and co-operating collaboratively to implement them. Whilst such attributes may characterise well-established rural villages underpinned by traditional leadership structures and social hierarchies, on which much of the theory and practice of community development and participation is based[3], they do not typify many poor urban areas that provide affordable accommodation to relatively new groupings of citizens in competition with each other for access to scarce urban resources at the same time as having to build new urban livelihoods and create supportive social networks (Riley & Wakely, 2005). Outcomes from participatory-based action are influenced by internal factors such as attributes of individuals in the community and external factors such as education, social norms, and interaction within certain institutions (Ostrom 2010:319). Urban poor areas are not homogenous; invariably they are composed of individuals and groups who represent diverse backgrounds.

Rapid urbanisation and the deterioration of social, economic and environmental conditions in cities of the developing world, as a consequence, are well documented. Policy discussions, of the mid Twentieth Century, on arresting urban expansion, in the hope that it would contain or remedy such deterioration came to naught. In its stead, urbanisation has been widely acknowledged as the major driver of national and global economic growth, social development and cultural diversity –all positive attributes. Consequently, global multilateral and bi-lateral agencies and organisations have actively acknowledged and promoted urbanisation through policy directives, on the basis that "cities are the engines of growth" (UNDP, 2017:50) and "the motors of growth" (OECD, 2015:15). For the first two decades of the

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2. Community participation is central to the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) 'New *Urban Agenda'*, endorsed by all Member States at the UN World Urban Forum in Quito, Ecuador in 2016.The New Urban Agenda supports the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2015-2030, adopted by the UN General Assembly in Sept.2015. Of particular relevance is Goal 11: "to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable" (United Nations 2015).

3. Ref: the theoretical constructs of Robert Putnam and others (Putnam 2006) and the operational work of Robert Chambers and others (Chambers 2017).

Twenty-first Century, there has been a proliferation of national and international activities focusing on generating explicit and tacit influence on rural people to migrate to cities, reversing previous demographic policies aimed at discouraging rural-to-urban migration (Bajracharya et.al.,1995; Ostby, 2015). In the post-COVID-19 world, higher densities in cities may seem anomalous. However, it is observed that the prevailing urban 'problems' maybe addressed, in part, by meeting the needs of low-income communities (World Bank 2020).

Following suit, the international 'development industry' considers urbanisation important and has been clamouring for a more urbanised future for developing countries, irrespective of the massive social, economic, environmental, equity and governance issues it has already impacted on these countries (McGranahan & Sattherwhite 2014). But there are dissenting voices that do not question the validity of the call for more economic growth based on bigger populations in cities, but challenge the entire foundation of the modernist inspired and Western experienced, understanding of city building, on which current arguments for urbanisation are based (Murray, 2017:93-146; Robinson, 2013). Thus, it is more critical than ever to understand what constitutes the community dynamic in urban areas, since there is ample evidence to suggest that the devolution of authority makes the amelioration of urban 'problems' more plausible (Wakely, 2018).

Urban low-income households are not all inalienably individualistic, competitive and uncooperative. They frequently demonstrate a pragmatic ability to come together for mutual support when faced by a common threat or crisis or an opportunity that they can use collectively to their mutual benefit if they come together in an organised way, usually disbanding when their short-term goals have been achieved. In several countries in Asia and Africa this capacity for autonomous local governance and mutual self-help has been embraced by governments, 'formalised' and incorporated in national development policies, particularly for rural areas, though with spinoffs relevant to urban (informal) low-income group communities[4].

Subsidiarity and the devolution of decision-making and administrative authority are commonly identified as essential ingredients to making informal self-governance and local management a reality (Suhartini and Jones, 2019:25-27). Devolution even in a limited sense can elevate the effectiveness of low-income group urban development programmes, because it enhances people's control of their own destiny, mitigating the debilitating sense of powerlessness that, more than anything else, is a symptom of poverty, which perpetuates and compounds deprivation (Davidson et. al.1992: pp.5-17).

Devolution and its impact on the community
Community dynamics have many similarities across the world. In Sydney, Australia, a Community Action Planning (CAP) Model encapsulated in devolution policies in state and local government services has transformed disjointed and disgruntled[5] urban public housing tenants, in a number of estates making them newly safe, cohesive, and empowered. The devolution of responsibilities allowed the tenant leadership limited authority over self-initiated reforms supported by the City Council and the New South Wales state housing authority, significantly enhancing tenants' quality of life. The CAP model enabled the public housing tenants in these estates to become equal players-- partners-- in the wider local community, accessing services and sharing resources, contributing to the community resource pool as citizens who had the power, capacity, and willingness to maintain this role (Mills and Brown, 2004, pp.113-115; Mataraarachchi, 2003). Again, in Australia, 'Shelter NSW', the New South Wales Tenant's Union and the City Futures Research Centre at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) have developed a 'Compact for Renewal' between agencies undertaking urban renewal in Sydney and the social housing tenants affected by such renewal. The 'Compact' developed through a series of focus group meetings with social housing tenants, which empowered them to be active partners in the Waterloo social housing renewal project (Coates, 2017).

Only rarely do community-based organisations with the capacity to manage local development and/or administer the delivery of urban services exist in urban low-income group neighbourhoods, without external supportive intervention. One exceptional example recounted in great analytical detail by Caroline Moser (2009), is the

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4. E.g. The Sarvodaya shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka in the 1950s-70s <https://www.sarvodaya.org>
Ujamaa Movement in Tanzania in the 1960s-70s <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ujamaa>
Harambee in Kenya in the 1960s-70s https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harambee

5. A conference of community housing providers organised by Community Housing Industry Association of New South Wales in Sydney in 2020 revealed that honest dialogue with social housing tenants is still largely considered a taboo, because of the common perception held by public housing workers that such straight dialogue can lead to raising hopes that may not be realisable due to the tight financial capacity of social housing providers (Mataraarachchi and Maljokovici, 2020).

development of the Idio Guayas community on permanently-flooded swampland on the fringes of Guayaquil, Ecuador, spontaneously led by a charismatic and energetic women squatter-resident, popularly supported by a range of distinct neighbourhood social networks that, over a thirty-year period, achieved the draining and filling of the swamp and the replacement of the original temporary bamboo shelters on stilts and precarious inter-connecting bamboo walkways over the contaminated tidal marsh, with permanent, fully serviced, concrete block houses and streets on dry land; also a radical reduction in family poverty and widespread upgrading of the social status of the Idio Guayas community as a whole, between 1978-2004. Another example is Aleppo, Syria, before the start of the civil war in 2011, where strong and well-organised 'Neighbourhood Committees', were informally convened and led, usually by local informal (unregistered) estate agents/land-dealers, occasionally in collaboration with formal, local government agents (*Mukhtars*) in several of the recognised large informal settlements in the city.

Participatory urban projects contribute more than the material benefits that help in reducing poverty. They stimulate and put in train a transformation that develops capacity and enhances confidence. Poverty can be identified as one of the most potent social determinants with a multitude of causes, sources, and outcomes. It is overwhelming and over encompassing compared to any other determinant when it is chronically deep-rooted in low-income settlements both in rural and urban areas. It is also a state of mind and powerless desperation in addition to being deprived of access to goods and services. But that deprivation is also the cause and the consequence of the state of mind. Endemic poverty generates a self-perpetuating mental state that denies the imagination and capability required for individual dynamism (Davdison, 1992; Kämpchen, 2011). Oxfam's Rose Cultivation Project by women and young people in the village of Arabsolangi, Sindh, India, demonstrated how communities and individuals had secured social status and self-respect by ameliorating their poverty through participatory livelihood activity (Alkire, 2004:56-67). What participatory democracy at the local level offers, mainly through livelihood related projects, can be truly transformative in rekindling dignity and self-worth to remove deep-seated powerlessness. This is also aligned with Sen's 'capability approach' to development (Sen, 1985; Frediani, 2010).

Thus, the will to receive the formal devolution of authority to low-income group communities is generally widely welcomed, provided that it comes with appropriate capacity building to enable responsible local governance and efficient and equitable local management, which it rarely does. The level of capacity required by communities and individuals in communities vary and again, as Ostrom (Ibid) identified, is largely based on external and internal factors. Thus, one of the basic tenets of the inter-dependent 'decentralisation', 'community participation' and 'good governance' paradigms for urban housing production and management is missing unless adequate appropriate support for its generation/regeneration is provided, not only at the level of low-income households and communities, but also at that of the 'enabling' institutions and authorities that support them[6].

Components of authority
Another significant misunderstanding lies in the concept of 'decentralisation' (devolution), the rhetoric of which is universally prominent amongst the basic principles of urban development projects and local government reform programmes throughout the world.

In considering different forms of participation and partnership in urban development, particularly the development of informal areas, it is important to distinguish between:

- governance as a democratic process of decision-making and setting standards;
- the management of new urban development initiatives and capital investments; and
- the routine administration of service delivery and the maintenance of infrastructure,

whilst recognising the inter-dependence of all three and the importance of their integration.

Governance and planning in a democracy are clearly participatory processes that engage all those who have a stake in decisions that are made, usually through a system of representation, though direct democracy (referenda, 'town-hall' meetings, community assemblies, etc) has an important place in many decision-making processes, particularly those involving, and within, low-income group urban communities, most of which are highly diverse, embracing social majorities and minorities, women, men, young and old, all with different needs, ambitions and allegiances.

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6. At an international symposium held in Nadi, Fiji in 2020, involving 12 Pacific Island countries concluded that it is solely the lack of capacity that restricts the development of low-income communities in the countries represented, adding that. "…the devolution of authority, without capacity is hollow and will not bring about the transformation we would envisage" (Mataraarachchi and Sprigg, 2020).

Managing the implementation of development plans through programmes and projects, particularly in low-income group neighbourhoods, is increasingly being shown to benefit from partnership arrangements between the funders/financiers (generally government or international agencies), regulators (local government) and the beneficiary communities (Wakely 2020). For example, the administration of service charges for day-to-day utility delivery (water, sanitation, power, etc) has also often been shown to be more efficient (affordable) when undertaken, at least in part, by the user community, either in a profit-sharing partnership or through sub-contracting arrangements with the service providers. Solid waste management and the maintenance of local infrastructure (street drains, local public open spaces, access ways, etc) and other community assets are generally more efficient and effective when in local control (*Das* 2015)

Enabling supports, capacity building and engagement

A range of approaches and techniques to advance and support, urban community development, organisation and management have been developed, largely through pragmatic, on-the-job, practice with, and by, urban low-income groups, living and working in informal, (and some) formal settlements in towns and cities throughout the world. A consistently successful family of community mobilisation techniques that centre upon participatory local domestic and environmental problems and collectively generated approaches to solving them and plans for local action to implement them has developed over a period of some 50 years. It is widely believed that this approach originated from a technique called '*Planning for Real (PFR)*', initiated by Tony Gibson in the north of England in the 1970s and subsequently adapted for application in deprived urban neighbourhoods in other European countries, notably Germany, Poland and the Netherlands, as well as several cities in Argentina, Chile and other Latin American countries (Gibson 1979). Closely related to PFR is '*Community Action Planning (CAP)*', specifically developed to mobilise low-income urban communities and strengthen their local management capacity for the implementation of the Urban Sub-programme of the Sri Lanka '*Million Houses Programme (MHP)*' in the 1980s (Hamdi & Goethert, 1997). ZOPP[7], '*Goal-oriented Project Planning*', is a similar environmental upgrading-based technique, within this family of community development and local management support and capacity building approaches, specifically designed and promoted by the German development co-operation agency Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammarbeit (GiZ) for application to the upgrading of low-income group informal settlements in developing countries of Africa and East Asia, where it has been applied widely (Helming & Göbel 1997). All of the techniques in this 'family' of approaches to environmentally centred community strengthening have a basic cumulative sequence of events in common:

1.   The starting point is to identify and agree a prioritised set of problems faced by the inhabitants of the neighbourhood in question. (This is unlikely to be a single homogenous list, but will be a series of 'problem' sub-groups, faced by different social groups –e.g. ethnic origin; women; men; children (boys, girls). With some regularity, the highest priority 'problem' is identified as "poverty and/or lack of access to income earning opportunities and political power".
2.   Stemming directly from the collective 'problem' identification stage, the public discussion turns to agreeing a common 'Vision' for the future of the community, its governance and physical environment (neighbourhood).
3.   This then leads into the development and agreement of a community 'action plan' that details and prioritises the actions and activities required to solve/ameliorate the 'problems', in order to achieve the 'Vision'. This process includes an examination of what actions and activities can be undertaken by the community organisation itself and those for which 'outside' technical, managerial, financial or legislative assistance will be required, and by whom (i.e. different levels of government, NGO or private sector intervention).
4.   The final stage is the establishment of a community-based operational organisation, with locally, popularly accepted/elected officers, from amongst the community, and where appropriate, their recognition by the relevant government agencies (Wakely 2020). In terms of practical sustainability, this is the most important stage to ensuring the continuity of autonomous local governance and the management of local environmental quality and the delivery of urban services. This process is invariably guided and facilitated by an individual or agency outside the community[8].

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7. Zieloorientierte Projektplanung

8. E.g. In the case of PFR in the 1970s, by Dr.Tony Gibson and/or his associates; In the Sri Lanka MHP in the 1980s, by the National Housing Development Authority technical staff and USAID and JICA technical assistance consultants (adapting Sarvodaya shramadana techniques); and ZOPP by GiZ technical assistance officers, all of whom were intimately familiar with the social, political and cultural contexts within which they were working.

On occasions, the intentions of such community capacity development projects have been thwarted by the build up of the community's dependence on the initiating external agencies because insufficient attention has been given to the maintenance of continuity after the external agencies withdraw, potentially leaving a managerial vacuum. This is largely due to the level of endurance of capacity the community has built over the life of the engagement and the effort taken by the engaging agencies to ensure that the community's capacity is strengthened to an adequate level. Appropriate and adequate capacity empowers the community and they in turn become capable of understanding their rights and obligations, accessing available resources, and ultimately making public authorities accountable. For example, this was successfully achieved, in Sri Lanka, where the foreign agency support and training personnel made a point of withdrawing 'gradually' and encouraging local NGOs[9] to be called upon by urban grass-roots Community Development Councils (CDCs) for advice/help, when needed. As evidence, following the devastation of many low-income neighbourhoods by the 2004 Asian tsunami in coastal towns in the south and east of the country, many CDCs that had been established in urban low-income group areas to benefit from the UNICEF-sponsored 'Urban Basic Services Programme' (UBSP) in the 1970s and the government's participatory 'Million Houses Programme' (MHP) in under-served urban settlements that followed it in the 1980s and had been left un-aided for over a decade, were spontaneously reconstituted by their office-bearers[10], to plan and manage local community social and economic rehabilitation and the physical reconstruction of their housing and domestic infrastructure (Hague, et al, 2006 pp.43-45).

In Conclusion
Invariably the introduction of any real participation or partnership in the planning and management of cities and the routine administration of infrastructure and delivery of services in low-income group neighbourhoods entails a degree of decentralisation or devolution of responsibility and authority that is alien to the low-income occupants of urban (informal) neighbourhoods that are affordable and socially accessible to them[11].

Experience has shown that effective participation depends upon a high level of community cohesion and solidarity, as demonstrated, for example, in the compilation of case studies from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean prepared by Habitat International Coalition (HIC) for the United Nations International Year of Shelter for the Homeless 1987 (Turner, 1988) and the Guide prepared for the UN World Urban Forum III–The World Planning Congress 2006 (Hague, et al, 2006). Many of the examples recounted in these publications and others[12] point to the importance of well-organised communities as a precursor to effective and sustainable local environmental development. They also show the 'other-side-of-the-coin' by which community participation and partnership in planning and managing the physical environment can provide a significant stimulus to wider issues of local social and economic development and the alleviation of the impacts of poverty and ultimately, its reduction by community-based organisations.

In addition to the plethora of practical case studies (sketches) of community development and participation, referred to above, there is an urgent need for research on longitudinal case studies that deliver more in-depth analytical insights into the effects of different organisational and institutional models of devolved local governance, maintenance and management of affordable low-income group urban neighbourhoods and the households and communities that live and work in them[13].

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9. Such as: Sevanatha Urban Resource Centre < http://www.sevanatha.org.lk>

10. Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer, etc.

11. The principle of **subsidiarity** is the recognition of the recognition of the economic and social need to devolve decision-making authority to the lowest effective level of operation. Decisions made at too high or too low a level are invariably uneconomic, inequitable and ineffective (Wakely 2018,p.37-39).

12. e.g. Mitlin & Satterthwaite 2004 and Nelson & Wright,1995

13. A view shared by Richard Lang (2019) with reference to collaborative low-income group housing for advancing social sustainability in the urban context.

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