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STRATEGIES FOR HOUSING THE LOWER INCOME GROUPS
IN THE DANDORA COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT, NAIROBI
A CASE STUDY

by

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2. INTRODUCTION

Housing the lower income groups is a universal problem. It is, however, more critical in the economically under-developed nations of the World. Kenya is one such nation trying to meet the needs of her rapidly growing urban and rural population. Nairobi, the largest urban centre, serves as an example of a rapidly growing urban area with its problems related to housing the urban lower income groups; and the various strategies to overcome these problems are illustrated by the numerous public and private housing developments throughout the City.

Nairobi and Mombasa are the largest of the urban centres and jointly account for about 70% of the total urban population in Kenya.

Nairobi has an estimated population of about 700,000 and is expected to increase to about 3,000,000 by the year 2000, having a growth rate of about 7% per annum. Out of the five levels of income groups in Nairobi, the lowest two levels constitute about 40% of the households having an income of less than K.Shs.500/- per month. Approximately 10,000 new dwellings are required in Nairobi annually to meet the existing and future demand until 1985. This demand needs to be met by both the public and the private sectors.

The Dandora Community Development Project is one example of a large scale attempt by the Nairobi City Council assisted by the Government of Kenya to programme, plan and implement a low cost housing solution for households earning as low as KShs.280/- per month. The project is expected to provide 6,000 services plots in 4 years. This in comparison to the annual demand is a 'drop in the ocean'.

The Dandora Project is intended to be the first in a series of site and service projects in Nairobi and also in other urban centres in the country. It is extremely crucial that the public and private sectors identify the problems of housing the urban lower income groups in the right context and develop appropriate strategies to overcome these problems.

One of the major issues related to this problem is the relationship between affordability of housing by the lower income groups and the expected standards and costs for housing as a reasonable balance.

Although the Government's official planning priorities as indicated in the Development Plans have repeatedly emphasized the adoption of urban infrastructure and shelter standards affordable by the majority of the population in the country as a whole, relatively little actual progress has been made. Presently used 'acceptable standards' cost too much for the people or the economy to afford on any scale, and has resulted in about one-third of the total urban population living in unauthorised and unserviced areas. There is an urgent need to find realistic solutions to the problems of housing the lower income groups and to actually implement lower affordable standard urban shelter programs on meaningful scales.

Site and services is only one of the several alternative strategies used to meet the shelter needs of the lower income groups. The range of the other strategies include conventional high standard public housing programs, which provide complete dwellings at higher costs and are occupied mainly by the middle and higher income groups (even though originally intended for the lower income groups), and private housing developments also mainly for the middle and higher income groups using presently 'acceptable standards'. The needs of the majority of lower income groups are presently met by popular illegal developments, squatter areas or old decaying congested slums. Another alternative strategy for housing the lower income groups, presently being considered in Nairobi and other major urban centres in Kenya, is the up-grading and improvement of existing squatter areas jointly with the site and services programmes. Both the site and services and the squatter up-grading strategies pre-suppose a progressive development approach using low costs, lower standards in the initial stages to eventual 'affordable' costs, 'affordable' standards in the final stages of the development.

However, there has been a general resistance to change public policy in view of the Building Code and the Public Health Act requirements. The most common objection being that the standards being proposed for the site and services projects and the squatter up-grading projects are lower than the ones stipulated in the by-laws and the Public Health Act. This lowering of standards, in the minds of the 'Law Enforcement Officers' will result in more health hazards and unhygienic, uncontrolled human settlements. Thus not solving the problem, but instead creating more problems. This objection, however, is debateable and numerous counter-arguments have been put forward by various housing experts. John Turner in his book, 'Freedom to Build' states the problem of standards in the chapter on 'Housing as a Verb':

"The most common objection to changes in public policy which would increase the users control in housing at the expense of central institutions is that standards would be lowered as a result. The standards the objecters have in mind, however, are not something which can be achieved with available resources but, rather, represent the objector's own notion of what housing ought to be".

He further argues that the enforcement of unrealistic standards (unilaterally defined as the minimum acceptable) serves only to worsen the housing conditions of the poor and raises the basic issue in housing - that of its meaning and value for people.

It is the intent of this paper to argue that the basic problem of housing the lower income groups is the need for a reasonable balance between affordability of housing by the lower income groups and the expected standards and costs for housing. The experience of the on-going Dandora Community Development Project in Nairobi, is used as a case study to look into this problem. The various strategies used in planning and implementing the project to overcome the various problems related to the economic/financial, technical, community development and administrative aspects of the project are discussed in the following sections of the paper.

Section three of the paper briefly describes the major objectives of the Dandora Community Department (D.C.D.D.) and the strategies related to the major objectives. The objectives and the strategies are the planned/anticipated objectives and strategies as stipulated in the project and loan agreements of the International Bank for Reconstruction & Development (I.B.R.D.)/the International Development Agency (I.D.A.), the Government of Kenya (GK) and the Nairobi City Council (N.C.C.); and also as stated in the Appraisal Report No. 607 a-KE for the Project, prepared by the I.B.R.D.

Section four of the paper includes a brief comparative analysis of the Dandora Community Development Project and the other public housing estates of N.C.C. such as Harambee, Umoja, Kibera and Buru Buru Estates. The analysis shows the relationships between the cost of building, cost of services, sale price, monthly payments and the 'affording' income groups. The section also includes an analysis of the estimated costs of the various components of the Dandora Project as compared to the actual costs in Phase I of the Project.