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Operationalizing community-led housing in practice: Lessons from Bangkok, Thailand and Mumbai, India

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Abstract

In developing countries, cities are experiencing rapid urbanization with increasing informality affecting urban poor to live in slums and squatters subject to eviction. Abating the issue, current participatory planning and collaborative actions are becoming popular. The major challenge in contemporary pro-poor housing practices is to explore the best practices of community participation, is well-discussed after the withdrawal of government intervention in housing and relying heavily on housing market. This study attempted to explore different forms of community participation to identify options introducing community-led housing in Bangkok and Mumbai for urban poor. The SWOT analyses of the ongoing projects in Bangkok and Mumbai identified scope and operational methodology of community-led housing. Results revealed that different forms of participatory practices are still considering urban poor as beneficiaries in expert-designed pre-determined projects and programmes. Community-led housing process has emerged as a different thought of action which is impulsive, inclusive and initiated by the community. We identified the elements of community-led housing are noticeable through representative networking, collective savings and blended financing, participatory designing, collective ownership, and participatory monitoring and evaluation. Although the community-led housing practice is becoming successful by enabling urban poor in five aspects, yet issue of scaling-up and institutionalization remains unsolved.

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Keywords: Collective savings; Community driven development; Participatory designing; Representative networking; Self-help housing

1. Introduction

In countries in rapidly urbanizing world, provision for public participation in planning has often been a result of

either direct import of western planning legislation or the funding of programmes and projects by international agencies (Jenkins et al., 2007). In most cases participation was introduced according to programme and project as an ingredient to support local initiatives in a micro scale to promote better coordination and sustainability in projects. Due to the piecemeal process of such planning approach the participation of poor people in planning was not mainstreamed until 1970s. Thus participation here was a way of tapping local communities' resources rather than providing them with real participation in decision making. Later

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UN-funded programmes and projects in the late 1980s and 1990s focused on ‘empowering’ local communities and ‘enabling’ these to manage their own development, thus supporting the implementation of enabling strategies (Jenkins et al., 2007). In addition to these forms of participation, urban poor people are often marginalized in decision making due to the lack of representativeness in the political structure.

The urban poor are occupying a major part of the economy in urban areas through informality but, similar to the case of recognition of their economic role, their rights are always suppressed and they remain invisible in decision-making and planning. In this context the programmes and projects are always supply oriented and the demand and capacity of urban poor remains unattended. To tackle this problem in 1990s, community action planning was introduced which took into consideration stakeholder interests and aims to put in place processes which were problem driven, community based, participatory, small in scale, fast and incremental, with results which are tangible, immediate and sustainable (Hamdi and Goethert, 1997). But this approach is never incorporated with the mainstream of planning rather it was exercised by international development agencies and aided projects and programmes on a piecemeal basis. However in urban management the partnership through participation is referred to as ‘community self-management’ which advocates an enablement paradigm. Moreover the policy options are not yet resolved as to how the community will be involved in the development planning to define development by their own. Understanding this context, to share common goals and objectives within and between organizations for redistributing power relations and participation of people in decision making and implementation Baan Mankong programme of Thailand and Alliance programme of India were initiated in the beginning of twentieth century. Therefore this paper attempts to identify the options for scaling up community led housing by analysing the Baan Mankong programme of Thailand and Alliance programme of India. These two programmes have been analysed in this paper by setting up the analytical framework of community-led housing in the first six sections.

2. Differences between community-driven and community-led development

In developing countries community-driven development (CDD) is the ongoing mechanism for channelling development aid to ensure community-based development. Community-based development is an umbrella term for projects that actively include beneficiaries in their design and management. Community-led development refers to development projects in which communities have direct control over key project decisions, including management of investment funds (Mansuri and Rao, 2004). In this context ‘community-driven’ refers to relying on the community for propulsion of an initiative that has originated and

perhaps directed from outside of the community whereas community-led seems to infer that the community are more involved in directing the trajectory of the project. But in most cases pro-poor planning is based on development assistance following the mechanisms of CDD. The participation of the urban poor is ensured in CDD process but the capacity building activities are still fragile to ensure sustainability and empowerment.

Community-driven development (CDD) provides control of decisions and resources to community groups. These groups often work in partnership with demand-responsive support organizations and service providers, including elected local governments, private sector, NGOs, and central government agencies. CDD is a way to provide social and infrastructure services, organize economic activity and resource management, empower poor people, improve governance, and enhance security of the poorest’ (Dongier et al., 2002). But the question arises in the situation which lacks the presence of such demand-responsive support organizations. In this context the capacity of community can be instrumental by creating an enabling environment for institutionalizing self-help approach, which is often exercised in the form of community-led development initiatives in many cases in developing countries (see Boonyabanacha, 2005; Burra, 2005; Hasan, 2006).

Community driven development (CDD) has been developed more as a variant of traditional development approach to incorporate participation and empowerment together. In literature, some elements of CDD have been frequently mentioned and the ‘institutional arrangements’, ‘community based targeting’, ‘learning by doing’, ‘access to information’, and ‘complementary service provision such as credit, extension’, and ‘demand-responsive support’ and these elements are linked by concepts like participation, community and social capital (Ribot, 2005). Table 1 identifies the evolution of development initiatives for the urban poor and also identifies the level of participation in those approaches.

These three approaches mentioned in Table 1 are always contested as the CDD approach assumes and exercises the vertical participatory approach where the programmes and projects are already chosen and communities are attached with these projects, whereas in community-led planning the sense and meaning of inclusive community is pre-existed to define the problem and identifying the capacities for alternative choices. Table 2 explains that the community-led and community-driven mechanisms differ in terms of capacity building and problem recognition. It is well-evident that without the capacity building through mobilization often development initiatives remain unsustainable in terms of efficiency, participation and the long-term livelihood impact (Satterthwaite, 2001).

The literature on CDD assumes that the results of participatory development interventions are always contested (Mansuri and Rao, 2004). However, this assumption arises from the pre-mature development initiatives where the voice of community is not well established to make a

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