

Informal settlement in Uganda

In Uganda, informal housing settlement means an area where groups of housing units have been constructed on land that the occupants have no legal claim to, or occupy illegally. These are usually unplanned settlements and areas where housing is not compliance with current planning and building regulations (unauthorized).

According to Mr. Sam Mabala, Ministry of Lands, Housing & Urban Development, Uganda Uganda is rapidly urbanizing at a rate of 5.2% per annum. It has a current estimated population Of 33.1 million growing at an average of 3.2% and projected to reach 110 million by 2050. Currently 19% of the population is in the urban areas expected to reach 50% by 2050. The high population growth is attributed to the high rural to urban influx, high natural population increase, creation of new administrative units, and expansion of the boundaries of the existing urban centers.

Mr. Mabala the Commissioner for Urban Development, Ministry of Lands Housing and Urban Development Uganda explained that the high rural to urban migration is due to economic inequality which forces the poor to move to urban areas in search of economic opportunities. Ultimately, this leads to urbanization of poverty as many of the immigrants lack skills for gainful employment hence join the mass of the unemployed and under-employed. This then contributes to the emergence of slums and informal settlements which are not planned, lacking basic urban services as well as security of tenure, since they cannot afford formal housing. He noted that 60% of the 6.3m urban population lives in the slums and informal settlements.

Existing Status: Uganda has put in place a national slum upgrading strategy which seeks to improve the living conditions in the existing slum settlements

Mr. Sam Mabala while at the same time halt any mushrooming of new slums or further expansion of the existing ones. It also has a national land use policy in place and it is in process of developing the national urban policy, the national housing policy, and the national land policy. With regard to the laws, The Constitution of the Republic of Uganda reformed the land tenure system and provided that land in Uganda belongs to the citizens of Uganda to be held under four tenure systems: the Freehold, the leasehold, the “Mailo”(private freehold) and Customary tenure. This was operationalized in the Land Act. It also repealed the Town and Country Planning Act and replaced it with the Physical Planning Act which among others declared the whole country as a planning area. Mr Mabala explained Uganda has in the past implemented four slum upgrading projects in Namuwongo in Kampala; Masese in Jinja; Malukhu in Mbale, and Oli in Arua. However, these have not been sustainable as some of the beneficiaries ended up selling off their interests. The lessons learnt from the previous informal settlement upgrading programs informed the design of the secondary cities program for transforming settlements of the urban poor in Uganda.

Vision: Uganda desires to realize cities and towns without slums and informal settlements *by getting rid of slums without getting rid of slum dwellers.*

Strategy: To achieve the above vision, the National Slum Upgrading strategy has been developed; this strategy spells out measures to prevent any further mushrooming of slums and to improve the current informal settlements. The strategy also has an action plan which outlines specific programs, projects and activities to be implemented in order to realize the vision. One of the programs being implemented is the Secondary Cities Program for transforming settlements of the urban poor in Uganda (TSUPU). TSUPU is being implemented with support from Cities Alliance and the Government. Its design was based on the following principles: *multi-stakeholder participation and integrated planning, promoting community spirit and empowerment, investment alignment, public private people partnership, skills alignment, city wide coverage, networking with the universities and communities, and sustainability.*

Under the TSUPU program, at the national level, a national urban policy will be developed to guide the urbanization process and enhance management of urban growth. Besides, a national urban campaign will be undertaken to sensitize the stakeholders about their roles and responsibilities in urban development and management. Furthermore, the urban indicators database will be maintained for purposes of monitoring performance of the cities. In addition, a national urban forum has been established as a platform for dialogue and participation of stakeholders to influence policy and legal reform.

At the city/municipal level, municipal development strategies will be developed to guide the long term development agenda in the respective Municipalities. Municipal developments forums have also been established to facilitate stakeholder participation in the planning and management of the Municipalities. The Capacities of the Municipalities will also be strengthened. Community upgrading fund has also been created to support implementation of community infrastructure projects in slums and informal settlements.

At the Community level, the slum dwellers have been mobilized into slum dwellers Federations where members are encouraged to save their incomes on a daily basis. Their capacities are being built through training and exchange visits. They are involved in household enumerations to generate information for planning purposes. It is envisaged the communities will partner with the land owners, private investor, Urban Local Governments to implement slum redevelopment programs through land sharing. With all these in place for sustainable informal settlement upgrading, the government has forged partnerships with the Urban Authorities Association of Uganda, the Slum Dwellers Federations, the Support NGO – Altogether, the Universities, and the Media.

It is clear that informal settlements and slums are an outward symptom or manifestation of urban poverty attributed to: inappropriate policy, legal and regulatory framework; dysfunctional land markets; unresponsive financial systems; corruption; lack of political will and above all bad governance. A more sustainable upgrading strategy must therefore recognize the above factors and address them with the commitment of all stakeholders. The need to ensure good governance in terms of political, economic and administrative dimensions is critical in building adequate capacity to effectively plan, implement, and manage urban development on a citywide scale to realize sustainable transformation.

Source; Approach of informal settlement upgrading... Centerforurbaninnovation.com