


A review of physical and socio-economic characteristics and intervention approaches of informal settlements

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Abstract

Informal settlements provide shelter to millions of poor urban dwellers in developing countries. Using a literature survey, this paper reviews physical and socio-economic characteristics and the factors attributed to proliferation of the informal settlements and intervention approaches. The main objective was to establish how such settlements could be improved and hence the quality of life of majority of the urban population.

Physical and socio-economic conditions found in informal settlements are generally hazardous to health and tend to exacerbate the severe socio-economic conditions of the urban poor as well as environmental pollution and degradation of the local ecosystems. Proliferation of the informal settlements, particularly in most cities of developing countries is as a result of market and public policy failure for a significant segment of the urban poor population.

The intervention approaches starting back in the 1950s include strengthening of public institutions and creation of policies and legislations to address the living environments of the urban poor, reforming building codes and standards, involvement of the private sector in housing provisions and programmes targeting both rural and urban development. Critical examination of these measures suggests the need for self-determination. In addition to these programmes, particularly informal settlement upgrading, this paper advocates the need for building technologies that are responsive to the urban poor and their environment. These are technologies that empowers the urban poor communities to make their own contribution to the process of improving their living conditions and hence the quality of life.

Keywords: Informal settlements; Building technology