

## AFFORDABILITY OF LOW INCOME HOUSING IN PUMWANI, NAIROBI, KENYA

Crispino C. Ochieng

### Abstract

*Since 1987, in Kenya, through the National Housing Corporation (NHC), an arm of the central government that delivers affordable houses, the local government embarked on the redevelopment of Pumwani the oldest surviving affordable low income housing in Nairobi. Pumwani was started in 1923 and it targeted early African immigrants to Nairobi.*

*Currently, the old Pumwani is home to some of the city's poorest dwellers majorities who depend on the informal sector for an income. Redevelopment was targeted at housing all the genuine dwellers. Instead delivery ended up with house types that were at first rejected by the beneficiaries.*

*Although the new housing was slightly of an improved physical and spatial quality it was unaffordable. Beneficiaries were required to pay an average monthly rent of US\$157 for up to eighteen years towards purchase of the new house. In the beginning, some of them had declined to take position of the newly built houses. To raise the basic rent majorities of those who have since moved in have opted to rent out some of the space. To date there is still standoff with some of the houses still unoccupied. Except during the period of social survey when the beneficiaries were brought in to supply the necessary information, the entire construction process was undertaken by NHC under a turnkey project. Among other factors the construction process was at fault*

*for it raised the costs. Also, some of the basic housing needs were not effectively looked into. There was a housing mismatch.*

### Keywords

Housing delivery; affordability; housing needs; sustainability; actors.

### Introduction

*Pumwani, aka Majengo, is Nairobi's oldest government informal settlement. The massive increase in Nairobi's population has not been matched by housing provision. The majority of Nairobi's population has settled in the informal settlements that dot the city's landscape. Residents of these settlements depended on unreliable forms of employment and earning. Informal housing only covers less than four percent of the land area. The majority of these settlements are in dilapidated conditions with some of the basic amenities such as water and toilets missing (Mutunga, 2000). By 1997, the City Council of Nairobi had recognized 49 informal settlements. Informal settlement is a basic part of Nairobi's landscape. To a great extent, past housing policies and strategies and failing*

All diagrams were developed by the author unless otherwise noted

economy are to blame (Government of Kenya, 1967 & Government of Kenya, 1997). These did not address the true situation of the majority of the residents of Nairobi.

Because of its status as a capital city and the assumed opportunities, Nairobi has continued to attract rural urban immigrants. Upon their arrival in the city the immigrants' move in to settle with their kinsmen majorities who reside in the informal settlements (Mutunga, 2000). The lucky few end up in poorly paying casual employment while others will move on to self-employment that is hardly rewarding. Majorities of the immigrants trade in imported ware in the streets of the Central Business District. Since the council would not allow this, the traders are always escaping from the law enforcement officers; hence the trade is not safe. At times, one may end up losing all the ware to the officers. Lately, *Pumwani* has been the center of dispute between the government and the targeted group that was to benefit from its upgrading program.

*Pumwani* has been redeveloped thrice. Each time a sector has been isolated and redeveloped. The main actor has been the National Housing Corporation (NHC), a non-profit making arm of the central government. The government disburses the housing funds to the local councils through this authority. The first redevelopment was in 1968. Before this, to identify future beneficiaries, NHC undertook a social survey among the residents of *Pumwani*. The second redevelopment was in 1987 and the most recent one was in 2002.

This recent development of the housing has brought about numerous violent protests by

the targeted population. Firstly, they view the allocation exercise as being riddled with corruption. Although the NHC thinks otherwise, the beneficiaries opine that the 1968 census results have been overtaken by event. Secondly, they view the monthly repayments as being beyond their means. In a two-roomed apartment, they have been offered opportunity for subletting one of the rooms at a rental charge that is much higher than they were earning from subletting before the upgrading. Thirdly, beneficiaries opine that they were never involved in the redevelopment. Although the latest redevelopment was completed in October 2005, the beneficiaries have refused to accept the offers. A housing delivery system that the government was of the view that would assist with housing the poor has been rejected outright.

### Methodology

A qualitative case study design was used for data collection. The method was used because of its ability to enable research to evaluate and also to explain housing strategies that have been applied to the settlement (Patton, 1997 & Leedy, 2002). First, a pilot study that lasted for seven days was used to confirm the guideline. During this period, key informants were identified and bridges with the community were built.

Combined methods including archival research, photography, sketching, discussions and watching people as they went about their normal life were used (Patton, 1997 & Leedy, 2002). Focused group discussions were also undertaken. Informants were selected from among long-term residents, women leaders,

youth groups' representatives, and opinion leaders.

Data collection lasted for six months (Leedy, 2002). In the weekends when the majority of the residents would be home, researchers would strive to spend the entire day in the settlement. With time, researchers were slowly accepted as part of the settlement. There were times when researchers were welcome to some of the houses and asked to share in a meal or a drink. There were social places, like the recreational hall, where researchers would meet with participants in a focused group discussion. The sessions were very lively especially as some of the participants would try to dominate the session. In the end sanity always prevailed as they joked over the whole discussion.

Data has been written in a narrative form (Leedy, 2002). Later on when reading these, underlying issues in housing system delivery were isolated. The rates of occurrences were recorded. There was the need to interpret some. Issues arising were easily followed through during the next exercise. The analyzed data, also, has been presented in a narrative form.

### ***Pumwani's Background***

Started in 1923 and located 2.5 Km from the Central Business District (CBD) *Pumwani* is the oldest informal settlement in Nairobi (fig. 1). Although it has an outlook of an informal settlement the entire place was originally planned and targeted to be a site and service scheme for the African populations which were then thinly spread around Nairobi. This is evident from the footprint of the overall plan. Land was parcelled into 1500 square feet pieces. The

settlement was planned for and provided with the necessary infrastructure and services such as roads, drainage, public baths and toilets.

Since 1968, some sectors of the settlement have since been redeveloped with high-rise housing blocks being built in the places that were previously occupied with slowly spreading individual ownership unit blocks (fig. 2).

The local government is the custodian of the entire land with the beneficiaries being in possession of temporary letters of allocation that gives them access to the land. Today, those with such letters are required to pay a nominal monthly ground rent to the council. So far, the government has confiscated about 158 parcels of land from those who have been unable to pay the ground rent.



Figure 1: Location Map of *Pumwani* (sources: City council of Nairobi, Forward Planning Group).



Figure 2: New Housing on the Background against the Old Houses that are at the Forefront. (Source: C. Ochieng).

### Social and Economic Factors

The majority of the residents here live in a marked level of poverty. And for the monthly rent payment, then relationship with the landlord is an important factor. This becomes useful during periods of crisis when one could have difficulty with rent payment. Lastly, people here have developed strong social relationship with one another. This helps in achieving some of the needs.

A considerable portion residents were engaged in poorly paying menial jobs with more than half the workforce earning less than one thousand Kenyan shillings a month (Ksh.1000.00 or US\$ 13.9). They could hardly afford a single meal a day. Few were in full-time employment, with the rest being engaged in casual employment and in the informal sector trading. They worked as security guards, cobblers, traders, hairdressers,

and sellers of illegal alcoholic beverages.

Here, trade in the street is a show of poverty. Here it can be witnessed products from the factory that have been dismembered and re-packed by the street traders to be sold at a cost that is affordable to the populace over here. For example, popular foodstuff that is sold in the streets are the skeletal parts of the fish that some of the traders buy at a throw away prize from the nearby fish processing industry. This is a delicacy. The flesh from this is exported by the industry to countries overseas. Dismembered factory products such as repacked solid cooking fat, tea-leaves, and soap among other things find their way into the street.

The number of people who have had to migrate from Pumwani and to move out to some of those settlements where they can still afford also explains poverty. Such settlements

are spread throughout Nairobi.

Within some of the sectors of *Pumwani*, there was a booming trade in sex and drugs. The former was carried out at the back of selected blocks where there were separate rooms that would be entered from the back and that were used for this trade. Elsewhere, drug locally known as *miraa* was traded in the open in front of selected blocks and also along the street. This is a locally grown plant whose leaves are chewed. Kenya Drug and Pharmacy Board have classified this as a harmful drug.

Those who have resided in *Pumwani* for more than half a century regard the place as "home". They reside in the same room with other family members. Slightly older siblings would move out to rent elsewhere preferably within *Pumwani*. Some have moved into the neighbouring *Eastleigh*, a settlement with traits that are similar to *Pumwani*. Some of the residents had relocated their family members to the rural home.

In *Pumwani*, for those who were renting, the landlord was seen to have a human face. When there was no money that was forthcoming a tenant would easily negotiate to pay the rent by instalments or when the monies could be available. Monthly rents ranged between seventy and one hundred sixty-five shillings a month (Ksh70-165 or US\$ 1-2.3).

More than 75 percent of the population developed different types of relationship with religion being the largest institution that had brought most people together. Kinship relationships were also dominant. Although not popular a few drew social bonds from ethnic

relations. Overall, people would easily reach out to assist those that are affected in times of need.

Although they were poorer, residents of *Pumwani* had developed ways of successfully achieving both their social and likewise economic needs. They were involved in all sorts of informal trading and employment. To fulfil their social need they relied on strong social networks.

### Politics in *Pumwani* Housing

In *Pumwani* there were several power bases. While some of these draw their power from outside, there are those who drew their power from within. The latter included the village elders, locally known as *wazee wa vijiji*, and some religious leaders.

The first type of leadership was by the government. They included the local chief, a much-hated figure. This was an appointed leadership. They enforced the laws and were blamed for some of the shortcomings especially with the ongoing redevelopment.

The second type of leadership was provided by the *wazee wa vijiji* who were from the settlement and were elected by the residents. They included those who were generally viewed as opinion makers and were at the same time committed to the needs of the settlement. Included in this were some of the religion leaders, selected group of elders and some of the elderly youths. They played a role in settling disputes by acting as the intermediaries among other roles. Last leadership is provided by the local Member of Parliament and the

council representative. The government took opinions of these two leaderships seriously.

In the informal settlements, politicians and those who advocate them continue to inform reactions to way that ideas are perceived. When some of those in leadership positions are left out of decision-making processes, there is minimal success.

### **Pumwani Housing Delivery System**

Today, Kenya has no national housing policy that could guide the development, regularization of land allocation and security of tenure in an informal settlement. This has been so in spite of the housing delivery system being the one that serves more than 75 percent of the city's population (Government of Kenya, 2003).

Both the 1968 and 1987 redevelopments of *Pumwani* were informed by the 1965/66 housing policy that addresses formal housing in which shelter was viewed in terms of health, security and privacy (Government of Kenya, 1967). This had emphasized on housing with minimum standards at the cost of all the other needs.

The 2002 housing delivery system in *Pumwani* was a turnkey one (Government of Kenya, 2003). The housing delivery system that had been employed to help in the redevelopment was not participatory. Upon its completion, each beneficiary was allocated a three bedroom apartment that had all the facilities in it. They were expected to sublet the extra bedrooms and to only occupy one. It was anticipated that the rent from this unit would be enough to provide for the housing needs. In an apartment, amenities such as toilets,

shower and kitchen were shared between the families. It was expected that they would sustain themselves from the subletting (Government of Kenya, 2003). The government expects the houses to be well maintained.

In the old *Pumwani*, houses were self-built with little help from craftsmen and the local labour force. They had been built from the savings and borrowings from friends. Resources were drawn from the cheap building materials that would easily be scavenged from the surroundings. Materials that were popular in the old housing blocks included waste metal sheets and wooden boards among other waste building materials. They built simple dwelling units that were targeted at providing basic shelter (Fig. 3a and 3b). A single housing block would have an average of eight minimal sized rooms that opened onto the double loaded corridor. The corridor provided room for communal activities while at the same time serving as a kitchen (Fig 3 a).

In the new *Pumwani* the actors did not invite participants of the future beneficiaries. They prescribe the housing needs without understanding underlying issues in an informal settlement and that at times inform some of the decision making.

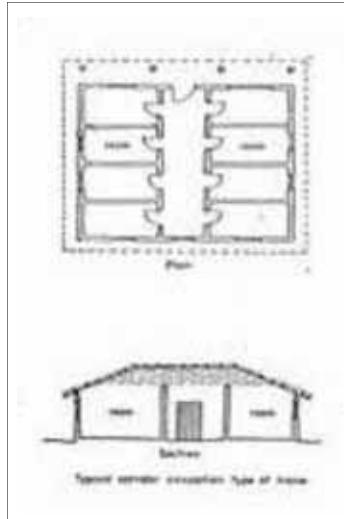


Figure 3-A: Old *Pumwani*, Typical Single Dwelling Block Plan and Section (Source: C. Ochieng).



Figure 3-A: *Pumwani*, Old block Built from Waste Metal Sheetting and Timber . (Source: C. Ochieng).

## Redevelopment and Housing Affordability

*Pumwani* has experienced housing redevelopments both in 1967, 1987 and 2002 as the most recent. In all the three, NHC has been main actor. NHC has its own pool of consultants and a list of approved building contractors and sub-contractors. To date the beneficiaries have not been involved in any decision making except for the social survey in 1968 when this happened.

In all the redevelopments, the contractor used conventional building materials such as masonry blocks, cement and roofing sheeting materials and machine technology (Fig 4). Paid labour was sourced from outside the *Pumwani*.

All the three developments delivered multi-storied apartment blocks. An apartment had a lounge, two living spaces, and centrally located kitchen, shower room, toilet and a lobby (Fig. 5). The rooms provided an opportunity for use by different families. Except for the living rooms that were meant for an individual family use, the rest could be used jointly. The typology was supposedly informed by the social survey and the old housing typology (Fig. 5).



Figure 4: *Pumwani* Ongoing Construction Works during 2002 Redevelopment. (Source: C. Ochieng).



Figure 5: Ground Floor Plan (source: National Housing Corporation).

In 1987, the cost of constructing a three room apartment was two hundred and seven thousand shillings (207 000 or USA \$ 2836) and in 2002 this rose to one million one hundred shillings (1 100 000.00 or USA \$ 15 068). In 1987, the beneficiaries were asked to pay a monthly rate of three thousand shillings (3 000 or USA \$ 41.5) for ten to fifteen years after which they would own the house. In 2002 the new redevelopment repayment rate rose to six thousand (6 000 or USA \$ 83.3). Being a tenant purchase scheme there was no down payment or any other kind of charges that were required. This was expected to reduce the cost.

NHC anticipates that with the advantage that the location offers in terms of opportunities, the rent from a single dwelling unit would be in the excess of the current one for the old houses that rent an average of seventy shillings per unit (70.00-165 or, US \$1-2.2). Estimated new rents per room would be six thousand shillings (6 000.00 or US \$ 83.3). The settlement is within a short walking distance both from the CBD and

likewise the industrial area.

Since the 2002 redevelopment, 444 apartments have been completed. Recent reactions have taken the form of protests. Firstly, there were complaints over the monthly payment that was considered by some to be prohibitive. Secondly, the list that was being used to identify the beneficiaries had been overtaken by history. NHC was using the 1968 census list. Allocations have since been put on hold and the NHC chief executive officer sacked.

The NHC estate manager refuted the allegations about corruption. According to the NHC, it is the 1968 list that establishes who was there then. NHC has an obligation to the original residents and not to the late-arrivals. As for the increase in repayment, there was no alarming difference between the 1986 repayment figures and the 2002 as it was Kenyan currency that had lost its value against the hard currencies. Then the dollar was worth eighteen shillings to the current rate of seventy-two.

NHC opined that the protests were due to the requirement that before being allocated a house the individual is required to physically demolish the old structure so that the demolished site may be used for the future expansion. The majority of the beneficiaries were unwilling to carry this out. NHC strategy views redevelopment in terms of improving the physical housing conditions with other housing needs taking the back seat.

### Reflections - Conclusion

Important parameters that should inform housing delivery system includes housing needs, affordability, housing policies, social and economic factors and politics. In the old *Pumwani* the provided infrastructure and services have since decayed due to neglect and lack of management.

The 1965/66 policy and selected housing delivery system that were relied on to inform the development in 1968 and similarly in 1987 were blind to affordability. They focused on health, security and privacy at the cost of relatively important housing needs. Unlike the previous one, the 2002 housing policy advocates for the government role to be limited to that of an enabler and for housing to be sustainable. Research raises questions on whether this latest redevelopment of *Pumwani* was sincerely informed by the same policy. Affordability has been a critical issue.

Residents of *Pumwani* are among the city's poor who can barely manage to survive on minimal resource a day. Such people prioritize housing needs with negotiation playing an important part in their survival. In the old *Pumwani* rent

payments were negotiated especially during periods of hardship. New developments required rents to be paid within a given period to the NHC. The human face of the landlord in the old settlements had been taken over by that of an institution, an anonymous face that is both callous and was not cultured to reason out.

Another important aspect of the poor is the social network. This provided security to everyone. Here, religion brought all together. Finally the majority having lived here for the better part of their life considered the settlement as their "home" and have developed sentimental attachments to it. Thus they would easily invest there. Due to many inherent factors that are bound to influence any settlement, it is necessary to adopt an inclusive approach for any redevelopment from the start.

### References

- Gatabaki-Kamau, R.C. (1995). The Politics of Expanding Informal Housing Sub-markets in Nairobi, Kenya: The Informal Development of Middle Income Settlements in 1961-1993, PhD Thesis, Birmingham, United Kingdom.
- Government of Kenya (1967). Housing Policy for Kenya Sessional Paper, Vol. 5, Government Printers, Nairobi, Kenya.
- Government of Kenya (1997). National Development Plan 1997-2000, Government Printer, Nairobi, Kenya.
- Government of Kenya (2003). Sessional Paper on National Housing Policy for Kenya, Ministry of Lands and Housing, Nairobi, Kenya.
- Leedy, P.D. (2002). Practical Research: Planning and Design, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition, Merrill, an imprint of Prentice Hall, New Jersey, USA.



Mutungu, W. (2004). Landlord/ Landlady Tenant Relationship in Urban Slum Areas: The Case Study of Korogocho in Nairobi, in Hulchansi, D., Murdie, R.A., & Campsie (eds.), Adequate and Affordable Housing for All, Research, Policy, Practice, Research Abstracts from the International Housing Research Conference, Center for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada.

Patton, M.Q. (1997). Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, California, USA.

United Nations Center for Human Settlement (Habitat) (1996). The Habitat Agenda: Goals and Principles, Commitments and Global Plan of Action, Istanbul, Turkey.