

# Creating Opportunities for the Urban Poor through Housing in The Philippines

A study of how adequate housing can help to improve the life of the Urban poor.



*Sarah Neill*

## 1 Introduction

Many studies have found that the living conditions of the urban poor have a great impact on the outcome and opportunities they have in improving their circumstances in life. In turn, if the basic needs are met, it can be seen to have a positive impact on the prosperity of the country.

The Third International Shelter Conference identified nine policy initiatives recommended to be given the highest priority by all international agencies, national governments, and housing organizations, I would like to highlight points 3, 4, and 5,

*3. Housing and real estate have a major impact on the national economy and economic progress.*

*4. Housing can be a leading sector for stimulating economic growth.*

*5. Housing benefits can be best attained within the context of an enabling framework that includes other sectors.*

(UNCHS, pp. 163- 164)

It can be argued that creating a higher standard of housing for the urban poor is a worthy investment that will only produce positive outcomes for the individual, community, and country. Globally approximately 1 billion people live in informal settlements (UN-Habitat 2006a), a lot of people whose needs are not catered for.

This paper will outline three main categories which can be influenced by architecture to improve the lives of the urban poor and explain why they are necessary. The three focus areas are self-help housing, education, and employment opportunities. If these needs are met a more sustainable community is created. In February of 2019 I embarked on a study trip to the Philippines with Lund University. I will draw upon my experience there for these three focus areas and analysis how they can be improved and how that will effect the lives of those living there. If the community has the right skills, tools, and room to grow, they will do so themselves. The needs of the community are ever changing, and it is important to create a flexible design that can respond to this.

## 2 Literature Review

### Self-help Housing

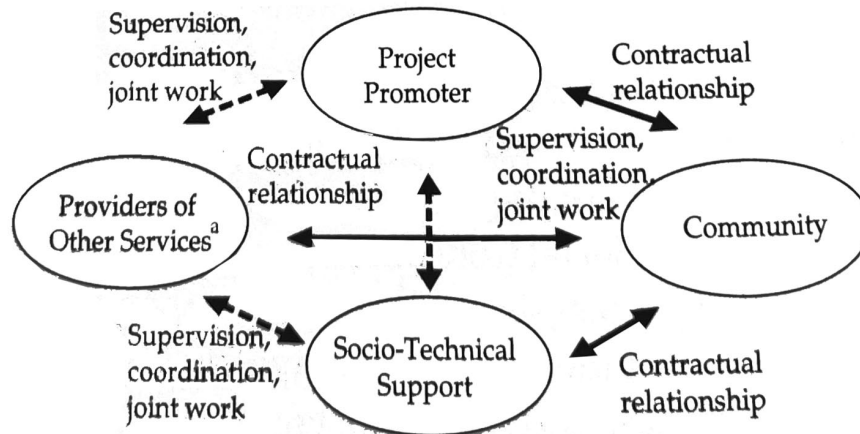
The term Self-help housing was first coined by John Turner, he suggested that in slums and suburban areas the poor already build for themselves. They have the skills to do so and will naturally want to improve and personalise their homes anyway. By taking advantage of this we can potentially save on construction costs.

Many self-help housing projects were implemented across the southern hemisphere, later Peter Ward (1982) wrote a critique of the process. Ward concluded that the reason state supported or provided self-help housing became popular was due to financial reasons. Predominating housing costs made it impossible for working-class families to be able to afford housing (Ward, 1982).

The projects that he studied failed due to poor implementation. This created a negative press towards self-help projects. The land purchased for the projects was too high in price for 20% of the urban poor. Relocation sites were often not well chosen and many of the Informal settler families did not like the relocation sites and sold the plots. There were misperceptions about the aims of the projects, many people thought that the government simply supported a lower standard of housing or were failing to take their responsibility for housing. (Ward, p. 20)

Another method that can be implemented is improving conditions in existing urban slums. The nature of the process leads towards community participation as it requires an in-depth knowledge of the area by the professionals which can be gained from those living there. It is mostly implemented in cities to solve issues

surrounding land ownership. Tenants of existing slums are given legal rights to their plots, which are upgraded to provide safe infrastructure and sanitation in. According to Ward, this strategy was extremely expensive to implement. Costs can be divided under 4 categories, (1) construction, including purchase of land and short-term bank loans, labour and transportation, (2) interest payments and capital, (3) ongoing use of maintenance, repair, and (4) modernization (Ward, 1982).



(1) Diagram example project Mutirao project, Sao Paulo showing how links between private sector, community involvement and the government function

With a greater use of community participation and workshops we can improve the strategies used to implement self-help housing and in turn lower costs. This was seen on our field trip to the Philippines where the architects at TAO Filipinas implemented community workshops at the beginning of all their informal settler family (ISF) projects. They have developed a tried and tested strategy for community participation which enables them to produce a final product that responds better to the individual needs of the community and is more financially sustainable in the long run.

### The Need for Educational Facilities nearby

If we look at the children living in a slum and analyze how their living conditions can be made better, the opportunity for further education in the area is highlighted. Lack of which, “directly violates the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development as enshrined in Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) of 1992” (Chatterjee, p. 479).

Areas that had proper facilities for education and healthcare are better valued among residents. This calls for a clear analysis in the beginning of the design process to see what the needs of the future inhabitants would be. What facilities are already located closely in the area and what need to be added on site. In general walking distance can be considered as a 1,500 to 3,000-foot radius around the area (Rusk, 2010). To facilitate all community buildings within this radius, densities must be high.

The ability to go to school keeps children off the street, keeping them out of gangs and improving their safety. Also, if they can achieve a diploma or similar, they can seek jobs in the formal sector and could eventually improve the conditions of the family. The presence of a school will also impact on the development of the individual even at a subconscious level, according to Bronfenbrenner (1979) a child's development is a dynamic system comprised of both physical and social structures.

Schools must also be well equipped, "The problems in the physical environment are framed through discussions on unsafe and insufficient water, lack of sanitation facilities, and overcrowded and unhealthy dwellings that make children vulnerable to disease" (Bartlett et al. 1999; Satterthwaite et al. 1996). Therefore, facilities that are placed on site must be well equipped to meet these conditions.

## Opportunities for employment

Historically many ISF resettlements studied by the United Nations Habitat (UN Habitat, 2016) have failed because of the long distances that the sites were from the family's place of work. Sites located further out of the city and further away from jobs were abandoned as families chose to remain in their old housing even if it was clear that the living conditions were worse there. This is because it is crucial for these families to be located near their places of work. Cars and public transport can be very expensive for families on such a tight budget and many people make a living from small businesses in their own homes. We saw this very often in the Philippines, Sari Sari stores could be seen around all the upgraded slums that we visited. Many of the people that we interviewed earned a large proportion of their income from these Sari Sari stores or similar small businesses. Like Attica, in Manggahan East, who created a small sewing station outside her apartment. For these vital income generators to be successful they need a flow of customers, being well connected to the city ensures this. We could see that there

was a strong longing from individuals to work. When studying low cost housing in developing countries Lizarralde (2015) saw both desire and potential within low income communities to manage their own affairs, financial matters and create their own sustainable community infrastructure and shelter.

The urban poor are skilled at negotiating the common space to take advantage of the trade opportunities there. The apartments are often designed to minimum regulations, like the BP220 in the Philippines, meaning that there is not enough space considered for making a living.

### 3 Argument, Critique or Discussion

#### Self-help housing

Training and allowing the community to take part in the process of developing their new home will lead to a more successful outcome. Through working with the community, the architects will be able to determine their specific needs and in turn cater to them.

Teaching the locals how to build will develop new skills within the community. It will provide more job opportunities in the short term and leave the neighbourhood with skilled workers that will now have more opportunities to find a job in the future. It also puts the capacity within the community for further development and maintenance of the site, saving costs in the long term.

Providing self-build plots will provide the potential for the individuals to develop and grow their own home to respond to their needs. For example, not every family will sell street food but those who do will maybe want to reconfigure the entrance space of their home to accommodate diners. “An interrelationship develops between people’s livelihood and living place, as income from a home-based business can allow housing to be upgraded, which can, in turn, improve working conditions and productivity.” (Thai et al. p. 927)

As families grow the small apartment may no longer be large enough to accommodate everyone yet the family may not be able to afford a larger place. Until they can, we can provide them the opportunity to invest in their current home. There will of course be those inhabitants who do not need a larger space and their needs must be met with the most basic block. Meaning that for self-help to affectively work the initial block must be fully equipped and liveable without any changes. Infill housing grants the freedom for life, livelihood, and social

networks within communities to go on throughout the process and is thus considered the best option within slum-upgrading literature (Chatterjee 2012). Allowing the community to adapt the design in this way will provide the potential to accurately cater for the needs of more of the population living there.

Whilst in the Philippines we spoke to an engineer, Jessica, from the National Housing Authority (NHA) who mostly worked with rehoming indigenous families. She explained to us that the people often come to them with more resilient designs for the extreme climate there. As they have built their own homes in the mountains for generations, which were well protected from typhoons and withstood earthquakes, they often have clever solutions for this when asked about how they would like their new home to be designed.

In the Philippines projects are often created with the possibility to own if the family keeps up with monthly payments over several years. This provides the opportunity for the family to better their circumstances in the future. Owning your own land is important as the families will be able to invest in the property and if anything happened to the home, say a natural disaster, all is not lost for the family and they would not have to start again.

### The Need for Educational Facilities nearby

Providing more schools will provide more jobs in the area and more skilled work. This may lead to the skilled workers, the teachers, living in or near the area. A mix of income levels in the area will help to break down barriers surrounding the community that may be affecting those who live there. “slum improvement plans would work better for children if they integrated the slum at least with the wider local area” (Chatterjee 2012, p. 483).

Keeping children in school for longer may prevent child labour and open many new doors for them later in life. During our trip to the Philippines we observed that the children’s education was something that provided a sense of pride for the families, with many of them hanging graduation photos on the wall.

### Opportunities for employment

Providing the possibility for employment opportunities within the area will make it self-sustaining. It will enhance the community feeling as street vendors will add life to the urban floor, and their presence will provide eyes on the street, helping to reduce crime levels. “The public realm in a slum permeates throughout the void where streets, common spaces of all scales merge to create the assemblage of

possibilities which not only include walking, recreation, play and social interactions but also spill-out spaces for home-based work, washing, cooking, bathing, storage and many other uses.” (Chatterjee 2012, p. 484).

The small shops play a key role in developing the community spirit. Everyone knows the shop owners and the sales provide the opportunity for conversational exchange between neighbours.

The Sari Sari stores will receive more business if they can be placed closer to the customer. This provides a strong argument for tighter streets and a denser community design. That is not to say that there is not room for other types of business in plots that are not connected to the street. A study of the inner districts of Hanoi, Vietnam discussed the impact living on secondary streets had on home-based businesses and saw that they relied on regular, loyal customers in smaller volumes to survive (Thai et al., 2018).

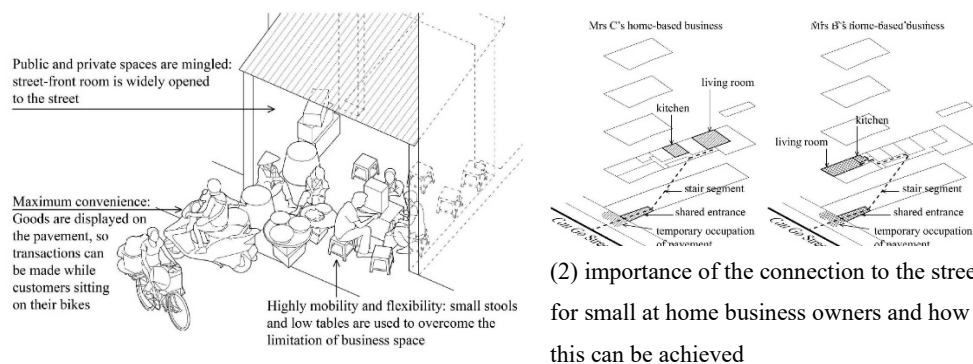
These businesses are predominantly homestay hostels and lodging houses, and manufacturing businesses, such as food preparation. The shared corridors also play an important role for businesses. Within ISF ‘tube-house’ designs semi-private alleyways, indoor corridors and stairways become part of the city’s organic urban morphology as they play an important role in the visibility and accessibility of home-based businesses (Thai et al., 2018).

Community buildings can also be used in a way to create employment opportunities. For example, many members of these communities do not feel safe without guards in the area. This could be tasked to those who lived there who would then receive a small payment every time they were on duty. Providing the added benefit of being a known and trusted person in the community. The leaders of the home owners’ association (HOA) could also receive a small payment for their work, making their efforts worthwhile as the time spent could otherwise be spent working.

## 4 Urban Shelter Design

From the points highlighted we can gather that there is a need for building regulations to be updated to provide a space for growth, larger family sizes and space for small businesses. The minimum size per unit should be increased. Community workshops should be made compulsory as they are the key to realising the needs of the community.

When designing the layout, the creation of hubs and their placement is important. These hubs could be community centres or education facilities. There is a need for a creation of dense streets which should revolve around these hubs and have many connection points. This is in order to increase the permeability of the streets and the liveliness of them. Housing should be placed with as much connection to the street as possible in consideration for the small businesses that will benefit from being closer to the customer. In Hanoi, Vietnam, pavements are an inseparable part of the street-front and the families that possess properties that have doors opening onto them often lease the space to street vendors who cannot afford fixed premises (Thai et al., 2018).



Plots should be established with the thought of how they will expand over the next ten years. For instance, set boundary lines a bit larger so that inhabitants can expand into this space or provide the possibility to add a loft.

As previously discussed, it is irrational to simply buy cheaper plots that are located far from jobs and services. People simply do not want to live there. It is better to invest more in the beginning and provide a site in a location with job possibilities, for example construction work, and facilities nearby. This will mean that the developer will not have to invest in adding all the facilities needed in the new plot and will connect the residents with the larger community of the city.

Materials used in the design should also be of consideration if the focus is that the community will take part in the building and in future be able to expand the design. “To enable self-help workers to build low-rise blocks, a light and cheap technology was needed. Traditional and rationalized technologies were not useful, because they needed a high level of training for the workers, and medium prefabricated technologies demand expensive plants and equipment.” (UNCHS, p. 41)



## 5 The Role of Architects

It is up to the architect to be aware of the livelihood of the ISFs. When designing there should not simply be an attitude to rehouse as many ISFs as possible. These are people not just numbers. If we continue to react in a supply demand way there will be families needing rehomed from slums that had already been upgraded in the future.

Architects should take the initiative to call for community meetings before the design has begun. They should analyse the site and consider what facilities are really needed in the area. If they see a site that is clearly remote and isolated, they should speak up about it.

The architect must think about how the families live day to day and thus provide room for privacy and for businesses to thrive in the homes. Think outside the box, In multiple-occupancy buildings, where upper floors and roof terraces can only be accessed from dark, narrow alleyways and steep staircases, we can still see many visits by tourists and café lovers (Thai et al. 2018). The architect could work to improve and enhance this characteristic. Many things can be learnt from the existing design of slums, “In a way slums embody the key urban design ideas posited by new urbanism: high density, compact, walkable, diverse and multi-use, car free and transit oriented.” (Chatterjee 2012, p. 484).

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