

# Low Income Housing in Historic Heritage Districts

Potential or threat?



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## 1 Urban Sector Review

### 1.1 Basic General Data

Ethiopia is one of the least urbanized countries in Africa. It is only 15% urbanized. This is actually changing fast because of migration and a more and more urban based economy.<sup>1</sup> All of its cities suffer from the problem of slumization brought about by various reasons.<sup>2</sup> The capital, Addis Ababa, taking the lions share of urban growth, is suffering the most.

Addis Ababa is a city with a history of 120 years. Founded by the unifier of Ethiopia, king Minelik II in 1896, it has undergone various changes under different regimes. In its initial stages it had no more than the character of a small village.<sup>3</sup> This was soon to change as many actors were to leave their mark on the city. Many visible and significant changes took place during the rule of the last emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie, the rule of the one party military regime known as the Derg and after the fall of the Derg.

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<sup>1</sup> Ethiopia has an urbanization rate of 4.8%. This is projected to increase in the coming years.

<sup>2</sup> 40 % slums are evident in most parts of urban Ethiopia. Mathewos, 2006

<sup>3</sup> Most of the architectural heritage of the capital dates from this early period of Addis Ababa's history.

During the imperial regime many steps were taken to modernize the city through the preparation of master plans. Some notable figures who prepared plans for Addis Ababa are Abercrombie and De Marien. These were grafted over the village like character of the city. Their effective implementation was a problem.

During the Derg (1975-1991) more significant developments took place as a result of the political system. The most significant proclamation (number 47/75) dictated that all extra houses owned by individuals will be nationalized and transferred to the government. The government then rented these houses to individuals based on their housing needs. The government alone was unable to ensure the upkeep of this huge amount of property. This proclamation and its consequences are still with us to this day.

This is the one development that led to a large number of households that had no security of tenure. These led to the proliferation of illegal constructions inside the previously more relaxed compounds owned by individuals as well as the government.

When one looks at some of the more dilapidated areas, there is overcrowded conditions effected by unregulated constructions. These areas are characterized by lack of basic services such as toilets, clean drinking water and adequate access roads.<sup>4</sup> Many houses are built from materials that are below the municipal regulations.

Other developments were to follow such as migration from the country side, more acute urban poverty, lack of adequate housing and population growth. Population growth has been significant in the last 30 years. A population that stood at thirty million in 1975 stands at more than seventy million today. In urban areas like Addis Ababa, where the population has grown from one million to three million without any upgrading of existing services and infrastructure, this has led to more scarcity in land for building housing thereby encouraging overcrowding .

The problems of poverty have become more widespread. Poverty has been intensified by the rise of unemployment since the time of the derg. More than 50% of the population in Addis Ababa lives below the total poverty line. This, added to the problem of the rise of cost of living, has made the affordability of

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<sup>4</sup> Many do not allow access by fire appliances

new housing or improvements to existing residences, impossible for many residents.

Overcrowding is prevalent in most households in Addis Ababa. Of the total Addis Ababa house holds, 24.8% live in overcrowded conditions. The average for the whole city is 2.1 persons per room.

After a 1991 developments in addis ababa are characterized by a significant growth in new building constructions, more intensified building of infrastructure, increased efforts to provide housing for the needy through government efforts as well as the private sector.<sup>5</sup> The lease of land to private developers has facilitated the loss of locational advantage for the urban poor. A good example for this is the kazanchis area redevelopment. The area is found in the inner city of addis ababa and it was originally inhabited by a mixture of poor and moderately well to do households. The whole settlement was wiped out and leased to private developers. The original settlers were relocated to outlying areas with limited infrastructure. The original settlers, especially those with low income, lost the advantage of the inner city where they could earn a living doing all sorts of small jobs.

## 1.2 Historic Districts and Delapidated Areas

There is limited knowledge about the importance of historic heritage buildings in Ethiopia in general and Addis Ababa in particular. There is even less awareness about the need to consider whole districts as heritage sites to ensure their continued existence.<sup>6</sup>

A governmental authority under the ministry of information and culture has been set up to lead projects in heritage conservation. This is the Authority for the Research and Conservation of Historic Heritage(ARCHH). This body has limited capacity however and its efforts are reserved for the most important heritage sites of Ethiopia such as axum, Lalibela, Gondar and other sites outside of Addis Ababa.

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<sup>5</sup> The outdated concept of government as provider of housing, in disregard to the so called paradigm shift from provider to support /nabil hamdi/

<sup>6</sup> A exemplary case here is the piazza area which needs to be considered as a historic district. Some developments in the form of new constructions are taking place in the area. Many have spoiled the characteristics of the place.



Figure 1 Arada, an Old Part of Addis Ababa

*Source: from authors archive*

The situation in Addis Ababa has become precarious for most of the historic heritage buildings. There is a fast pace of development in the city at the moment. As mentioned above building by private developers has intensified. Unprecedented road building is being carried out. However the most detrimental for historic heritage buildings has been the building of medium rise condominium housing in the inner city. Sadly these projects are actually carried out by the city government from design to site choice until construction supervision. Many instances exist where buildings listed by the city government are demolished to make way for condominiums. Some others are built too close to heritage buildings with little consideration for the setting the historic building enjoyed originally.

Many of these heritage buildings are owned by the government and rented to low income settlers.<sup>7</sup> Few low income settlers have awareness about the value of the buildings they are living in.

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<sup>7</sup> Look at back ground information on these houses on page 1

### 1.3 Policy

There has not been a clear set of policies on urban development in Ethiopia.<sup>8</sup> The central policy for urban issues in Addis Ababa is that on land ownership. All land is owned by the government at the moment with all construction considered built on leased land.

Other policy documents have been forwarded by the government. To mention some; the draft document of urban development policy with emphasis on ‘the necessity of improving the life of the urban poor through integrating low cost housing in urban development’,<sup>9</sup> the draft document of urban planning proclamation making one of its main agendas the reduction of urban problems through urban redevelopment, urban renewal, upgrading and land reallocation, the federal urban planning manual, slum upgrading manual, etc.

Whatever the policy may be the city government suffers from a lack of capacity and commitment to enforce and implement its policies. This is especially true concerning low income settlements.

### 1.4 Actors and their Roles

The main actors in urban development in Addis Ababa today are the government, NGOs and the private developer. The government plays the role of regulator and supplier of land and financial loans to investors. The government has been instrumental in the transformation of the city be it in road building or the construction of housing. An equally important role is being played by the private developer. But efforts here are concerned with profit making not improvement in the living condition of the urban poor

When it comes to improvement efforts targeting the urban poor the role of non governmental organizations stands out from among the rest. Some exemplary work has been done by NGOs working in Addis Ababa. To mention a few; CARE, CONCERN, REDD-BARNA, IHA/UDP, AND EECMY. From among these the work of IHA/UDP (Integrated Holistic Approach for Urban Development Projects) has been quite successful. This is as a result of their belief that provision of physical amenities will not be enough to ensure the continued

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<sup>8</sup> Government attention to urban development is a recent phenomenon, mathewos, 2006

health of communities. Care is another NGO whose presence can be felt in most parts of Addis Ababa. They are especially concerned with the improvement of urban services through local roads rehabilitation and provision of communal sanitary services in some of the most dilapidated areas.

The role of international financiers that foster projects for urban improvements should not be forgotten.

## 2 Organisation

I am an architect from Ethiopia, in East Africa. I have my first degree in Architecture and Urban Planning. I completed my post graduate studies in urban design and planning. I took the course in Conservation And Management of Historic Buildings in 2004 at Lund University. I now teach at Unity University in the School of Architecture and Urban Planning. I also runs a consultancy office involved in architectural and urban design projects.

Unity university was established in 1998 with a limited number of students. It grew fast however and it now has close to 5000 students. Unity university's head quarters are located in the capital Addis Ababa but it has branches outside of the capital. It is a private orgazation with the aim of producing professionals that can function in the ever changing working environment. This school is now responsible for producing a portion of the future architects and urban planners of Ethiopia.

The curriculum of the school of architecture and urban planning is under revision at the moment and Mihretu is involved in this processs. The revision is being done by forming streams such as architectural science courses, buildings construction courses, urban planning courses and architectural design courses. My task is to look into the content and methodology used in the architectural design courses from second to fourth and final year. It is common in Ethiopian architectural schools that briefs for projects, which are the main method of training students, are based on a limited scope of considerations. To mention a few, spatial character, the quality of units and questions of infrastructure. The above are important but our urban problems also require more emphasis on issues

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<sup>9</sup> Mathewos,2006

such as options for financing projects and ways of alleviating urban poverty. Our country being a developing one urban professionals should be more in tune with the problems on the ground. A good example would be the urban poverty in the capital that would not escape anybody's notice.

### 3 Urban Problem

Addis Ababa in its earliest stages was a city of a much smaller size. The original city was concentrated around three important centers. These are the Ghebi (imperial compound), Arada (market place with giorgis church) and Filwoha (which used to be the center for entertainment). Most of the historic heritage sites inside the capital can be found in this triangle. A number of buildings have been listed by the city government as historic heritage. Little action is taken however to conserve these buildings. With a few efforts of individuals and some NGOs to protect these buildings, little else is being done to ensure their survival for future generations.

It has to be mentioned here that it has become the core of inner city Addis Ababa. It is however an area characterized by dilapidated housing conditions. How do we improve urban conditions of the poor in these areas without compromising the status of the abundant historic heritage?



Figure 2, Aerial Photo of The Arada Area In Addis Ababa,  
*Source: Google Earth*

## 4 Proposal for Change and Improvement

City wide identification of valuable heritage districts with the extent of low income housing based on The Addis Ababa Master Plan, It would be better to prepare sensitization events for government bodies, the private sector and the general population. A strategic plan can be drawn out with a five to ten year plan to implement regeneration strategies

Detailed guidance should be established through local development plans or conservation plans depending on the situation. A participatory approach must be applied for the urban design process.

Mixed use functions ensure the vibrant character of places, but at the same time providing the possibility of appreciation by the largest number of users. In such a situation housing must become an integral part. This housing must have housing of different economic classes.

Institutional capacity of concerned government bodies is one of the culprits. This is on the one hand because of lack of capacity on the part of the authority for the research and conservation of historic heritage (ARCHH) and on the other because of the absence of an institutional body in the municipality that is concerned with the protection of urban heritage. Little meaningful protection and regeneration can happen without enhancing the capacities of these two government bodies.

Financial capacities of individuals to acquire land, build own housing or make improvement to existing housing are limited. On the other hand financial institutions are not financially capable of providing loans for the large proportion of the urban poor. They also do not have proper methods (such as requirements on collateral and provision of subsidies) that can facilitate provision of loans to the urban poor.

We need to involve all stake holders in the process of regeneration. In the context of Ethiopia non governmental organization have been effective in many of their upgrading projects. Their efforts can be combined with the efforts of the private sector which has a profit making interest in regeneration areas. Community based organizations have the initiative to be involved in projects that



are in the benefiting them. Concerned citizens and professionals have the ability to contribute if they are provided with an enabling environment.

## 5 Personal Action Plan

### One year plan (2009)

The first task will be the process of preparing a paper on directions to be taken on courses of architectural design and urban planning. Stressing the complexity of problems in the built environment in our country (especially giving emphasis to the historicity and/or urban poverty in many locations) will follow. This stage is concerned with curriculum revision of the School Of Architecture And Urban Planning at Unity University. At the same time principles learned at WUF IV will be applied on urban design and planning projects to be done in the consultancy office.

### Five year plan (2009-2014)

In the following five years after 2009, work will start on applying methods of including housing strategies for different income groups on projects at the university. Using architectural design and urban planning projects, familiarizing students on how low income housing can be worked on parallel with other components of a design program will be one of the central tasks of these academic years. Chosen projects will be given to students with more complexity by adding a heritage component.

There will be involvement in urban planning courses for architects in the university. In this process it will be possible to increase the skill of students in using inclusive methods in projects. It will also be possible to apply principles learned at WUF IV on urban planning and design projects to be done in the consultancy office in the coming years.

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