

PROACTIVE INCREMENTAL CORE-HOUSE STRATEGY IN THE THIRD WORLD

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Exploring the emerging strategy of incrementally expanded core-starter housing, which is considered to be one of the few – if not the only – effective proactive strategy for addressing the housing demands from the expected population explosion of Third World cities.

Respected studies predict a doubling of population with a tripling of urban growth in Third World cities by 2030. Sloganized as ‘building all of the urban housing of the past 6,000 years but this time in 20 years.’ – this demands a fundamental shift in practice and strategy. Even if the reality of the next 20 years is less than feared, the trend is clear: there is a tremendous need for housing, with concurrent demands on land with severe consequences on urban expansion. Costs of building ‘instant’ housing are prohibitive. Continued focus on upgrading informal areas dooms us to expensive, after-the-fact disruptive strategies. Capitalizing and expanding on the incremental expansion process suggests ways for cities to guide their growth in partnership with the many informal and formal homeowners. Cities are challenged to provide vital infrastructure and services, while incremental development offers an option of housing, and often with a density increase promoting compact cities and lowering demand on scarce urban land.

Incremental construction and expansion of housing is the key process of increasing housing stock and housing quality in most cities. In rapidly growing cities informal building and expansion – the pay-as-you-go process – is the dominating pattern, particularly in the majority low-income sectors. Their simple starter makeshift ‘cores,’ transform themselves to surprisingly good quality ‘middle-income’ housing given sufficient time and limited constraints. But they do not stop there, but often add extra units which are a net gain to a city’s housing stock while providing rental income to the families. Formal housing often exhibits the same expansion process from a different starting point, and with equal advantages.

Emerging Information shows that incremental growth offers a strategic opportunity for an

effective increase in housing supply and quality. The informal incremental/staged process of housing growth has not been embraced nor well understood in the past, but new studies have traced the long-term growth and expansion benefits.

Core-house/starter house programs for the low income had been formally adopted in the 70s led by the multi-nationals – World Bank, United Nations, and bi-laterals. However, these 'site and services'

Projects lost favor, in part for failure to recognize the inherent long-term process. Studies now suggest their efficacy and 'champions' have emerged for revisiting this approach, which is slowly being adopted worldwide. The studies also point out issues that need to be addressed; for example, the quality of individual self-managed house expansion is often deficient, with serious consequences, particularly in disaster prone areas, and the difficulty in locating projects. Parallel demands on infrastructure are not well considered, which directly impact city development.

Agencies involved in rebuilding after disasters have embraced a strategy of 'relief with development', linking the emergency measures to long-term reconstruction. Essentially this is in support of the efficacy of the incremental development process, and points to the value of an incremental strategy for housing, applicable to cities as well.