

## **Coupling Informality with Formality: Steps to Workable Housing Strategies**

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Informality today, and perhaps more importantly in the years to come, remains to be the dominant mode of urban production in many cities of developing nations. Informal settlements for many urban dwellers are the only viable alternative for accessing land, services, job opportunities and social mobility. Yet, much of the current planning and design approaches in these cities disregard and even alienate this form of urbanization. Informal settlements, which are referred as “slums” are often associated with unsafe, unsanitary, badly serviced living environments without security of tenure. Modernist housing provider model, i.e. strong public sector involvement in a centralized production of ready-made minimum-standard housing units, was introduced both to address the problem of housing shortage in the era of rapid urbanization and to solve the problem of “slums”. However, the inappropriateness of the strategy particularly in addressing social and economic needs of the people gradually became apparent in many places. The dissatisfaction with modernist housing solutions has motivated reconsideration of traditional methods housing production and more increasingly in recent years, many studies are directed to understanding the production and functioning of informal settlements.

Studies have shown the many qualities in the informal settlements such as qualities in the process of formation which involves successful layers of negotiation, appropriation and efficient utilization of spaces, innovative approaches inherent in the designing of smaller detail. Very few attempts have been made, however, to transfer this understanding into the design of planned areas.

In development studies, discussions about formality and informality have often revolved around issues of property rights where the value of secure tenure is and its link to poverty alleviation is emphasized (eg. Un-Habitat, 1999) Recommendations in a number of these studies and the resulting planning approaches reflect dichotomy between informality and formality.

This study rather than strengthening the informality/formality dichotomy, which is evidenced in either/or suggestions, attempts to find a housing strategy that recognizes and thus integrates the different qualities in the informal and formal approaches. To this end, paying particular attention on the social and spatial aspects, the paper tries to investigate what works and what does not work in “slums” and “modernist housing” environments.

The study largely uses empirical evidences from own ethnographic study of the ongoing large scale condominium housing program of Addis Ababa supplemented with cases from other African countries. Attempt will be made to use body of knowledge from works of Charles Correa (1985), Graham Tiple (2000), Hernando De Soto (2000), Elinor Östrom (1996, 2006).