

Assessment of the role of institutionalised self-help housing in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in Post-Apartheid South Africa

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Abstract:

This paper assesses the role of institutionalised self-help housing as postulated by John Turner in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) in post-apartheid South Africa. This study problematises how the two are interlinked, the challenges and opportunities that self-help housing presents in realising sustainable development goals. This study adopts a systematic literature review approach to critique the self-help housing policy i.e. enhanced peoples housing process whose objectives emerged out of the broader housing policy of Breaking New Ground (BNG). The study adopts a qualitative research approach and uses secondary data sources, which is presented thematically. This study is limited because it does not use primary data from self-help organised groups and beneficiaries of housing provision to understand the limitations of neoliberal agenda in achieving SDGs in the Global South. This study found that Turner's ideas were heavily disputed by Marxist scholars, who argued that self-help leads to the commodification of housing. There are practical implications of Turner's work in that governments should not have to provide aspects of housing, which people can provide for themselves. This study concludes that Turner was in favour of dweller-control, whereas the World Bank's neoliberal approach was based on the economics of housing and that, self-help is influenced by neoliberalism, where the market, individualism and commodification of a house reinforces poverty. As a result, institutionalised self-help has advantages in delivering sustainable human settlements but has limitations in achieving sustainable development goals.

Keywords:

Breaking New Ground, Institutionalised Self-help Housing, Neoliberalism, Self-help Housing, Sustainable Development Goals

Introduction

The dawn of democracy in South Africa in 1994 has exposed the existence of housing backlog, which tested the government's capacity for housing delivery to the majority of the poor households in both urban and rural areas. Over time from Nelson Mandela to Cyril Ramaphosa's administration, the South African government has been actively engaged in addressing the huge housing challenges, which includes reducing the housing backlog and improving the low quality of living conditions. The first administration of Nelson Mandela, which was forged through Government of National Unity (GNU) focused institutional reforms

to address the injustices of the past and on building a non-racial, inclusive democratic society. Through the Department of Human Settlements, the government introduced a national housing programme that targeted low-income households through subsidy that aimed to provide a piece of land, building a basic house with the installation of basic services such as water, sanitation, and refuse removal and electricity. This means the South African government intervened to address the problem of housing the poor people. Moreover, South Africa made significant progress in building structures for a democratic state partly for the purpose of implementing housing development. The historically fragmented housing delivery governance structures were consolidated into a system designed to serve developmental objectives, which was concretised through the promulgation of the White Paper on Housing in 1994 and the National Housing Act in 1997 and later Breaking New Ground in 2004. This served as the basis for implementing self-help housing to citizens in South Africa.

Evidence and practices in different countries show that self-help housing has been adopted as a housing option. Evidence also indicates that self-help was successful in several countries because poor people have the freedom to make their own housing decisions (Ward, 1981). Self-help housing in the context of developing countries is commonly associated with the ideas of JFC Turner (Turner, 1976). From his experience working as an architect in Peru and as a consultant for the World Bank, Turner argues that the role of the government in self-help housing is to “create an enabling environment for housing delivery through legislation and the provision of subsidies to poor and low-income households.”

According to Harms (1992), self-help housing delivery should be taken as "a form of community-based housing delivery [mechanism] whereby individual households are responsible for provision of their own housing". It was observed that "self-help housing can take various forms ranging from self-build (individual households or group self-help), which relates more to technical aspects of house building. Collective actions around housing relate more strongly to organisational and political actions to improve living conditions beyond housing". Existing evidence suggests that a local builder's hiring of and supervision in building a home is commonly known as the local contractor option, where the household is responsible for decision making, site layout, house design, materials procurement, and financial management. The definition is relevant to the self-help housing approach applicable in the context of in-situ upgrading of informal settlements and site and services projects implemented in different parts of South Africa.

Self-help housing is one of the most prevalent housing options globally (Ward, 1982; Harris, 1998; Dingle, 1999), and researchers have formulated ideas on the topic (Harris, 2003). The notion of self-help in developing countries is commonly (rightfully or wrongly) attributed to JFC Turner (Turner, 1976). Drawing from the evolution and the practice of self-help housing around the world, it has become apparent that there are contestations taking place amongst different researchers. Still, due to limited space in this study and the guiding theme, the contestations will not be engaged as it is discussed somewhere (Sithole, 2015). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to assess the role of institutionalised self-help housing as postulated by John Turner in achieving SDGs in the post-apartheid South Africa. This study intends to problematise how the two are interlinked and the challenges and opportunities that self-help housing presents to realise sustainable development.

This study will firstly engage with the origins and a broader conceptual debate of self-help housing. Secondly, it provides the role of institutionalised self-help housing soon after different types of self-help housing are discussed, and its legislative framework in South Africa. The

findings section, thematically analyses concepts from the literature review. The themes of interest are; i) SDGs, BNG and Institutionalised Self-Help Housing, ii) Enabling a Neoliberal Approach to Housing Provision and power dynamics, iii) Institutionalising Housing for poverty alleviation and iv) SDGs, BNG and Institutionalised Self-Help Housing towards poverty alleviation.

Literature Review

This section covers the origins of self-help housing. It engages different debates about self-help housing which aims to demonstrate that John Turner popularised this housing solution but the concept did not originate from him. Furthermore, it covers different types of self-help housing. Lastly, it focuses on one type of self-help housing which is institutionalised self-help housing.

Origin of Self-Help Housing

Self-help housing has a long history in housing studies. Pugh (2001) traces the origins of self-help in the housing environment and found that it became an important paradigm in housing delivery since the 1960s but did consider that it has been with humankind for centuries. The reason provided on why it dominated in the 1960s was that there was a failure of government-driven housing development. Harris (1998) avers that self-help housing was commonly practised prior to the introduction of formal town planning. Harris gave a geo-spatial evidence which affirmed that self-help housing started to be practiced in urban areas from the 1900s even prior to the commonly accepted notion in the 1960s that John Turner spurred self-help housing. Other scholars also traced the history of self-help housing schemes, particularly in developing countries, and revealed that self-help housing dates back from the 1930s and 1940s when US-agencies like the 'Housing and Home Finance Administration' and later the 'International Cooperation Administration' introduced pilot projects to specific Latin American countries such as Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Chile (Mathey, 1992; Tait, 1997).

In Africa, Keivani and Werna (2001) found that poor people living in urban areas had always been housed under conditions, which today are referred to as self-help housing schemes. These findings agree with Harris (1998) that the use of self-help housing as a solution in the developing world was initiated in the 1930s. This challenges the commonly held views that self-help housing originated from Turner ideas in the 1960s. Harris (1998) further supported this historical view through scholarly evidence that during the pre-Second World War period, the most pronounced advocate of the theory and practice of self-help housing was Jacob L. Crane. Harris (1998) observed that through his writings on self-help housing, Crane elaborated on the logic behind the theory of self-help housing and further helped to initiate certain self-help housing projects. Harris further concluded that Crane published extensively (Crane, 1944; 1949; Crane & Foster, 1953; Crane & McCabe, 1950 as cited in Harris, 1998) but his works were soon overlooked and forgotten. A conclusion reached by scholars has been that Turner succeeded in changing the world's perception about self-help housing programmes as an alternative means of low-income housing provision, even though these ideas never originated from him (Harris, 2003).

Different Types of Self-Help Housing

The existing literature distinguishes between three types of self-help housing, namely *laissez-faire* self-help, aided self-help and institutionalised self-help. The primary focus of this study is on the low-income housing programmes. Therefore the focus is on institutionalised self-help, but other types are also briefly discussed in this study.

There are three types of self-housing practices. Writers note that the first form of self-help is effectuated without any aid or assistance from government. Scholars support this view that self-help without government assistance was practised worldwide for centuries by low and high-income households (Hardy & Ward, 1984; Harris, 1991; Jenkins et al., 2001). Rodell and Skinner (1983) note that the second form of self-help housing is termed “aided self-help”, which comprises an approach in which site-and-service schemes have played a crucial role. This type of self-help housing creates an environment in which people could build for themselves Ward and Maccolloo (1992) maintain that these two forms of self-help housing were motivated by a range of political-economic arguments, which were about reducing the costs for governments, and transfer costs to the individual, while at the same time making housing more affordable to the individual households.

The third self-help housing practice is implemented through institutions or organisations, which involves the establishment of housing cooperatives. Scholars observed that self-help housing cooperatives were largely used in India, Jordan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Thailand, Iran, Cuba, Egypt, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Zambia (Khurana, 2001; Kerr & Kwele, 1998; Midgley et al., 1986; Harris, 1997; Sukumar, 2000; Keivani & Werna, 2001; Gough, 1996). Scholars also argue that self-help housing was commonly associated with neo-liberalism, and was also implemented in countries with socialist policies. This third form of self-help housing is called institutionalised self-help housing which is the focus of this study and is discussed separately below.

Institutionalised Self-Help Housing

International literature shows that self-help housing has been implemented through institutional organisations, and this involved the establishment of self-help groups often called 'housing cooperatives' (Mathey, 1992; Keivani & Werna, 2001). In co-operative housing, a group of households provide their own housing and there is an element of a contribution of collective labour and the group of households receives advice, support and/or training from an external agency. According to Khurana (2001), housing cooperatives can be described as a legally incorporated group of persons of limited means pursuing the same cause of meeting the common need for housing or its improvement based on mutual assistance. Keivana and Werna (2001) argue that groups are able to negotiate on behalf of its members to acquire land from the government or on the private market, apply for and receive credit or mortgage loans from the government and from formal-sector institutions, receiving building materials and commissioning contractors to build the housing units. Moreover, in housing cooperatives membership is voluntary, control is democratic, and members make an equal contribution to the capital required (Khurana, 2001).

However, government's role, either directly or indirectly, in the activities of these institutions remains the main concern. This is further analysed in the next sections of this study. It would thus be well within the scope of this study, in the next section, to give an overview of countries in the developing world that have used institutionalised self-help (housing cooperatives) as an alternative mechanism for the provision of low-income housing. Furthermore, the role of

different stakeholders in the operationalisation of these institutions is also analysed. That is finally followed by a discussion of the successes and challenges faced by the housing cooperatives.

Legislative Framework for Self-Help Housing in South Africa

The Peoples Housing Policy of 1997 which was later revised to an Enhanced Peoples Housing Process was designed as a policy instrument to allow people build for themselves and not wait for government to do things for them. The assumption of the policy was that people have resources i.e. money, time and labour. Therefore, the rationale of the self-help housing policy in the South African policy was that individuals, communities could bring their resources together to help themselves improve their living standards and environment by themselves and for themselves.

The self-help housing policy was also influenced by the UN-HABITAT's Peoples Partnership Trust initiative that was established to support self-help policy in South Africa. This structure was later absorbed into the National Department of Housing. Omenya (2006) notes that most self-help housing policies internationally, have been influenced by neoliberal policy positions of the World Bank and UN-Habitat as well as by other international, bilateral and regional development agencies and donors.

Lessons learnt from this structure influenced the peoples housing process. A number of NGO's lobbied for the policy to provide an options for people to build for themselves as this could provide a better outcome than what government was able to provide. The Peoples Housing Policy was revised and enhanced to bring support organisations and structures such as cooperatives for different purposes i.e. building cooperatives, savings cooperatives for employment creation etc.

The Enhanced People's Housing Process Guidelines of 2009 (EPHP) provided a process where beneficiary participation, individuals and communities are empowered to take control of their housing process themselves. This includes identifying the land, planning the settlement, getting approvals and resources to begin the development, contracting out or building their houses and providing the services, living in and up-grading their homes, and continually improving their lives as community members. Further outcomes stipulated in the self-help policy includes supporting partnerships for social capital, building livelihood, creating poverty-alleviation opportunities for the communities, using a house as an asset, far beyond its monetary value for all the value-added components it provides for individual household members, and for the family as a whole, stimulates local economic development is promoted and increase the local multiplier effect of the self-help process.

At the centre of the self-help housing policy, i.e. Enhanced Peoples Housing Process is the principle of partnerships between government, cooperatives and civil society. These actors assume different roles in delivering housing as a basic need that enables the realisation of other socio-economic rights and benefits such as security, income and access to basic services such as water, electricity and sanitation. The principle of partnership between government and civil society in self-help policies is a key principle that could encourage the involvement and a collective effort of community-based self-help initiatives to realise the Sustainable Development Goals.

Self-Help Housing and SDGs

SDG's and Institutionalised Self-Help Housing

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly presented the Sustainable Development Goals as a blueprint to be used to achieve a better life for all world citizens by 2030. During the Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015, a total of 193 countries adopted these goals as a 'guide' to improve the well-being of the human race and the planet by tackling social, environmental, political and economical issues globally, South Africa being one of the member states (General Assembly, 2015; McCloskey, 2019).

The ultimate aim of the SDGs is to end world poverty without compromising the earth's life-supporting systems and ensuring that in so doing, no one is left behind. Underlying the SDG's is a somewhat moral obligation to the less privileged, the environment and to future generations (Gert and Kharas, 2018). These moral obligation undertones have been greatly debated by some scholars (Beckerman, 1994; Daly, 1995). Affordable housing is one way to attack the plight of poverty. The relationship between housing and sustainable development drives the ideas behind the Sustainable Housing concept. There is extensive literature on this concept, and it acknowledges the centrality of housing to achieving SDGs (Golubchikov & Badyina, 2012). Further to this, the concept advocates for affordable housing as a condition that is necessary for transformation.

SDG 11 is about realising sustainable, safe, resilient and inclusive cities and communities. One of its seven outcome targets addresses safe and affordable housing. This goal is the only target where housing is explicitly articulated. According to Winston and Eastaway (2008), housing is an essential part of the overall quality of life, if sustainably realised 14 of the 17 SDG targets would be achieved (Winston and Eastaway, 2008). Rust (2020) explains that, once housing is established, access to basic services can be achieved (SDG 2,3,4,6 and 9), inclusive growth promoted (SDG 1, 5, 8, 10, 12 and 17) and a contribution made towards a sustainable future (SDG 7 and 13).

BNG and Institutionalised Self-Help Housing

The South African Breaking New Ground (BNG) policy is rooted in the principles of Sustainable Development. It is a comprehensive plan seeking to refocus policy attention from the delivery of just subsidised houses as 'units' to ensuring the development of Sustainable Human Settlements from a holistic perspective. Additional to this, BNG corrects the top-down supply driven approach of its predecessor policy, the White Paper on Housing, with a bottom-up demand-driven delivery approach (Department of Housing, 2004). The BNG policy has 7 objectives all with an ultimate goal of poverty alleviation as also seen with the SDGs.

Self-Help principles find expression in the BNG policy (Ntema, 2011). The policy allows members to have dweller control as well as to exercise power to build dwellings responding to their cultural habits, economic and social context as also advocated by Turner (1976).

Research Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design informed by an interpretivist paradigm. A qualitative approach can be defined as a descriptive approach to collect and interpret information to understand a social phenomenon and develop an in-depth understanding of

individual views, attitudes, and behaviour (Moore, 2000: 121). In essence, this study used secondary data sources to gather information that helped inform the study based on the research topic. The nature of information reviewed was theories and approaches that explain the role of self-help housing approach in achieving SDG's. The researcher reviewed information obtained from a variety of written material: government policy documents, books, journal articles, published and unpublished articles, internet and other publications, to inform the study based on what had been written before on the subject of self-help housing delivery and Sustainable Development Goals. The review of documents was necessary to draw from the sources on international and local experience in the context of self-help housing delivery in general and specifically the role of institutionalised self-help housing delivery in the context of Breaking New Ground (BNG) policy.

Neoliberalism is necessary for this study because it has influenced the current housing policy in South Africa and the role government plays in housing delivery. The study also made use of references from international agencies involved in housing, namely the World Bank and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) also known as UN-Habitat (UN-Habitat, 2000:185). Existing studies showed that the World Bank was the first institution to come up with the concept of site and services and has had an influence on National Housing and Urban Policies. The World Bank argued that the role of the government is to support the beneficiaries' efforts to build their housing on a progressive basis. The thematic analysis and interpretation of data was conducted following a qualitative approach. The thematic analysis of data is conducted according to the origin of self-help housing and post-apartheid planning for housing development in South Africa and the possible contribution this approach has or may have in achieving SDG's.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents a thematic analysis and interpretation of the literature review.

1.8.1 SDGs, BNG and Institutionalised Self-Help Housing

In an analysis where the BNG objectives to the SDGs it seeks to address (Table 1) are contrasted, linkages and contradictions are observed. At face value, both have a moral drive towards alleviating poverty and improving the lives of the impoverished. They both acknowledge the centrality of housing to basic service delivery, improved health and an overall improved quality of life. Institutionalised Self-Help Housing, however, in its traditional untailored form, is neoliberal. Neoliberalism is innately driven by exploitation, privatisation and commodification, it promotes individuality and is anti-static (Peck and Tickell, 2002). The moral drive for Self-Help then becomes questionable. These contradictions run deep in the South African state.

Table 1. Linkages between BNG objectives and SDGs

BNG objectives	SDGs addressed
Accelerate the delivery of housing as a key strategy for poverty alleviation.	1, 2, 3, 6,7, and 11
Utilise the provision of housing as a major job creation strategy.	1,2,3,5,8,and 9
Ensure that property can be accessed by all as an asset for wealth creation and empowerment.	5, and 10
Leverage growth in the economy.	8
Combat crime, promote social cohesion and improve quality of life for the poor.	1,2,3,10 and 16,
Support the functioning of the entire single residential property boom and the second economy slump.	1, 8, 9, and 16
Utilise housing as an instrument for the development of sustainable human settlements, in support of spatial restructuring.	9 and 16

Source:
adapted
from

Department of Housing (2004) and United Nations (2020)

1.8.2 *Enabling a Neoliberal Approach to Housing Provision and power dynamics*

To understand or craft the nature of the state, we would have to historicise it. Understanding the economic devastation of its people, the Freedom Charter envisioned a state-centric developmental project. In other words, a developmental state where government's intervention is vital for the empowerment of a previously oppressed group (Stagar, 2008). The South African Institutionalised Self-Help Housing model assumes that its target group has the financial resources; it could be contradictory for the targeted group in the South African context. It could be excluding and disempowering the poorest of the poor. It appears to be applying neoliberal strategies to a group that perhaps requires a more morally driven developmental approach.

The formation of institutions for the housing delivery process needs to consider power dynamics and vested interests from multiple stakeholders, rendering the process counterintuitive. The rights and interests of the impoverished can easily be overpowered in such cases. Ntema (2011) advises that the involvement of the state to ensure the successful delivery of houses would remain key. The statement that 'people doing it by themselves and for themselves' could thus be an overambitious one in such a context.

1.8.3 *Institutionalising the Provision of Housing for poverty alleviation*

The BNG policy has an objective of using housing to create job opportunities but, outside of supporting local businesses, the policy is not clear on how an opportunity to be a member of the cooperation would be regarded as a job, as far as remuneration is concerned. Burgess' argument is that this approach assists government to achieve some of their fundamental responsibilities for housing delivery at the expense of the poor (Stein, 1991). Therefore, as much as the Institutionalised Self-Help approach can address some of the SDGs, the manner in which it is delivered can be seen as exploitive with little to no outcomes for the alleviation of extreme poverty. It can also be interpreted as the enablement of a markets approach to the delivery of SDGs, which can yield the developmental results. It also socially rises from a neoliberal, capitalist ideology, an approach known to reinforce poverty. One would want to recall that, the ultimate goal of the SDGs, just as the BNG, is to alleviate poverty (Gert and Kharas, 2018).

1.8.4 SDGs, BNG and Institutionalised Self-Help Housing towards poverty alleviation

As Institutionalised Self-Help Housing principles and the BNG are also orientated towards national economic goals where housing is a means to achieve neoliberal goals as well as the SDGs. This can be argued to present itself as a double standard as the moral drive of the SDG's is not the same calibre as the capitalist and developmental nature of neoliberalism.

Self-Help policies promote unpaid labour by the poor in the delivery of houses. According to Burgess (1977), this approach is an inhumane strategy by the state to achieve national housing delivery targets at the expense of the poor. SDGs advocate for sharing the wealth with the poor, not for further exploitation or to share wealth amongst themselves. According to Velencian analysts observing through a neoliberal lens, the concern with SDGs is that they reproduce the same status quo. This is because they employ a managerialist and technical approach without addressing the root causes of impoverishment which are created by neoliberalism itself (Belda-Miguel et al., 2019). According to McCloskey (2019), SDGs are toothless in the face of neoliberalism.

Harris et al., (2008) explains that South Africa's institutionalised approach to Self-Help policies is inherently contradictory. It is hedged between the borders of neoliberalism and is a strategy for the state to maintain control over housing delivery. Harris et al., (2008) agrees with Bauman (2003) that the South African model to housing delivery has households who are in actual sense beneficiaries of a house that they built through a controlled and designed process. Within the South African context, which considers itself a hybrid developmental state, perhaps a more morally driven approach is necessary (Satgar, 2012).

Lessons can be drawn from countries like Cuba which upon its economy collapse in 1990, employed the Self-Help approach to housing delivery in a cautious way. Cuba managed the clash of its socialist nature to that of the neoliberal Self-Help policy by tailoring the Self-Help policy and contextualising it to their Socialist tradition by plucking out some exploitive neoliberal tendencies. Cuba used co-operatives but without the state's constant intervention as in South Africa (Harris et al., 2008).

Even with efforts where affordable/Self-Help housing is placed at the center of meeting the SDGs, self-help policies have not contributed significantly in the fight against the plight of poverty. The SDG 2020 report confirmed that the world is not on track to meeting the SDGs by 2030 (United Nations, 2020). To McCloskey (2019), the elephant in the room, is Neoliberalism.

Conclusion and Further Research

In conclusion, we can use the Institutionalised Self-Help approach to deliver a house in a settlement for those in need. It can ensure the delivery of basic services such as sanitation, improved safety and health, as well as an improved overall quality of life. Concurrently, as encouraged by the BNG policy, the procurement of building materials from local businesses is a way to support the local economy and improve the lives of the business owners. In this way, the neoliberal approach to housing, would have addressed a majority of the SDGs. This approach, however, is contradictory with many gaps and as far as the ultimate goal of the SDG's is concerned, the approach is likely to reinforce poverty, instead of 'leaving no one behind'.

Self-help would have been an ideal approach for the realisation of SDGs but it is influenced by vested interests, neoliberal tendencies, market forces, capitalist views that have commodified

the house. Therefore, in the South African context, self-help housing as a process and an approach for collective effort and individual effort may have limited impact because of its neoliberal origins and influence. The paper's findings thus suggest that government in the delivery of housing through the application of the Institutionalised Self-Help Housing approach should consider the revision of policy to ensure the alignment of housing delivery to SDGs and inclusion of the moral obligations in this approach.

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