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## INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS MUST BE UPGRADED IN AN EFFECTIVE AND ORDERLY MANNER

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### Key Points

- Finding solution to problems associated with the emergence of informal settlements have been a challenge for the Government of Papua New Guinea (GoPNG).
- Upgrading an informal settlement can improve the living conditions in the settlement and sustain residents' social and economic networks.
- In order for an upgrade project to be effective, it is important for GoPNG to provide effective guidelines for implementing the project.
- As an upgrade project impact on activities of residents, they should be fully involved in the project and their preferred infrastructure and services provided.
- In order to avoid the issuance of titles to customary land grabbers, an effective mechanism must be used to identify genuine landowners.

inquire  
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## INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS MUST BE UPGRADED IN AN EFFECTIVE AND ORDERLY MANNER

**Eugene E. Ezebilo**

The increase in informal settlements have often been a challenge for the government of most developing countries, including Papua New Guinea (PNG). Various government supported initiatives such as opposition to the existence of informal settlements, eviction of residents and upgrade of the settlements have been implemented to address the challenges associated with informal settlements. This paper focuses on one of the findings from a Discussion Paper by Savadogo and Ezebilo (2021) concerning strategy to improve living conditions in informal settlements in Port Moresby. The paper stated that informal settlement residents should be fully involved in an upgrade project of the settlements where they live and effective guidelines applied. The study was based on the survey conducted in 10 informal settlements in Port Moresby on residents' preferences and perception on how a settlement upgrade project should be implemented. In this article, emphasis is placed on how to implement an informal settlement upgrade project in effective and sustainable manner. Although there are various aspects to consider in promoting the effectiveness of implementing a project such as the competence of the project manager, scope and realistic requirements of the project, project planning, communication strategy and coaching of the project staff. However, this article has focused primarily on the participation of beneficiary communities and the development of appropriate guidelines.

### What is informal settlement?

An informal settlement is a residential area where (UN-Habitat, 2015):

- Residents do not often have security of tenure for land and houses they live in.
- Residents may be squatters or rent houses informally.
- Basic infrastructure such as potable piped-borne water, good road network and electricity are either lacking or connected illegally.
- Basic services such as health care, security services (police station), education services (schools) and modern market facilities are lacking.
- Make-shift houses are often available in large number.
- Houses constructed in the area do not often comply with building regulations and plan.

### What factors contribute to the emergence of informal settlements?

Several factors that contribute to the springing up of informal settlements especially in cities include the following:

**Population growth.** When the population of a country grows faster than the rate at which infrastructure and services are provided, some people tend to be restricted from accessing the infrastructure and services.

**Rural-urban migration.** As a result of inadequate employment opportunities and lack of basic infrastructure and services in rural areas, rural dwellers tend to migrate to urban areas. This contributes to the growth of urban population and compel some urban residents who cannot pay for facilities to move to informal settlements.

**Lack of affordable housing.** In cases where a household income is not enough to pay for house rent in areas that have basic infrastructure and services, members of the household may move to informal settlements where they would be able to pay house rent or construct make-shift houses.

**Weak governance, especially policy, planning and urban management.** Informal settlement is a product of market failure and some people benefit from it. If the governance of an urban area is not effective, some people may prefer to live in informal settlements and engage in informal activities to evade tax.

**Displacement caused by conflicts and natural disasters such as earthquake and climate change.** People who have been displaced where they live may migrate to other areas. They often end up in informal settlements because they may need land for agriculture and other activities to support their livelihoods. As the land tenure in informal settlement is not often clear they can easily access land there.

### How does government often treat informal settlements?

Governments of some countries do not often acknowledge the existence of informal settlements (Avis, 2016). This often restricts city-wide sustainable development and prosperity. Thus, making informal settlements to be disengaged from the wider-urban system and exclude residents from decision-making and opportunities in urban areas. Informal settlements are often:

- Opposed by some governments by not acknowledging their existence. Governments tend to suppress and

restrict the emergence of informal settlements. However, this does not often result in addressing the problems that push some people to informal settlement. Proliferation of informal settlements in an urban area or a city is a symptom of governance failures that must be addressed. There is a need to address the failure rather than providing treatment to the symptom.

- Eviction. In some cases, informal settlement residents are forcefully removed from the settlement and their properties confiscated. This can result in the loss of livelihoods for people who establish businesses there. It can destroy the economic social networks that people have built over time. Eviction does not provide solution to the informal settlement problems. In fact, it may worsen the already fragile situation because it often renders some people homeless, jobless and threatens the existence of the poor and vulnerable people.
- Relocation of informal settlement residents. This entails the movement of residents to areas where the government has approved to resettle them. The government may assist in providing housing to informal settlement residents in an area that has all basic utilities. However, some people may lose their social and economic networks, which are important for their welfare.
- Upgrade of informal settlements. This involves providing basic infrastructure and services in the informal settlements and land tenure regularised. This arrangement is widely accepted as the most preferable compared to other arrangements. This is because it can assist informal settlement residents to sustain their social and economic networks, which are necessary for their livelihoods. Upgrading a settlement involves the transformation of various dimensions of the settlement such as economic, social, organisation and environment. Its goal is often to achieve settlement security. It is important to note that upgrading informal settlements has the potential to increase prices of land and housing, which might have adverse impact on the availability of affordable housing for low-income households and vulnerable persons. For informal settlements upgrade to be sustainable, it is important to understand the socio-economic dynamics of residents and their willingness to accept the proposed changes associated with the upgrade.

### Potential guidelines for upgrading an informal settlement in PNG

The guidelines for upgrading informal settlements provides steps, priorities for recognising informal tenure and weak

ownership rights as well as how to provide clear ownership titles and registration (Potsiou et al., 2019). For the guidelines to be effective, the guidelines require a series of comprehensive and consistent land policies and economic reforms for management of land. The informal settlement upgrade guidelines can be classified into the following phases:

#### i. The strategy phase. This comprises the following:

- o Seeking support from key stakeholders such as Department of Lands and Physical Planning (DLPP), National Housing Corporation (NHC), Department of Justice and Attorney General, Water PNG, PNG Power Limited and municipal authorities such as National Capital District Commission (NCDC), civil society organisations and community leaders of the informal settlement being upgraded.
- o Assessment of the characteristics of the existing informal settlements to be upgraded.
- o Identification of and consultation with community leaders of the informal settlements to be upgraded.
- o Conducting cost-benefit analysis to determine the consequences of not upgrading the informal settlements.
- o Discussing the appropriate informal settlement upgrade strategy with key stakeholders.
- o Development of a communication strategy.
- o Documentation of an upgrade strategy.

#### ii. Framework preparation phase

This phase consists of a series of steps based on the plan of action that were considered in the strategy phase. The following steps make up the framework preparation phase:

- o Development of a scale of preference that contains a list of informal settlements in which the settlements to be upgraded appears at the top of the list.
- o Determination of how to address the issues associated with land ownership and tenure.
- o Identification of actions to be taken in order to convert informal settlement to formal in collaboration with beneficiary communities.
- o Providing a guide on the procedures that landowners would follow to access titles and building permits as well as any other registrations required to formalise an informal settlement.
- o Documentation of upgrade procedures, fees and penalties established.

- o Determination of the institutions that will be primarily involved in the implementation of the upgrade program such as NCDC in collaboration with DLPP and NHC.
- o Determination of the administrative system that will be used to activate communication strategy.

### iii. Upgrade implementation/construction phase

This phase consists of various administrative and legal functions, fee collection, registration and monitoring of development. It includes the following:

- o Development of criteria that residents who are genuine landowners or squatters should meet to qualify for land titles.
- o Determination of areas where infrastructure will be constructed.
- o Submission and processing of documents associated with land registration, building permits and claims.
- o Construction of infrastructure and facility for services.
- o Continuation of the registration of developments in the informal settlement.
- o Taking appropriate legal actions against residents that do not comply to established processes.
- o Identify an entity to implement penalties against residents or property owners that do not comply to set rules.
- o Implement an effective monitoring mechanism to make the process sustainable.

### Port Moresby informal settlement residents' views on how an upgrade project should be implemented

In a Port Moresby study of informal settlements in Port Moresby, Savadogo and Ezebilo (2021) found that residents believed that settlement upgrade project will be effective by doing the following:

- Involving informal settlement residents in planning the upgrade project and employing some of them in the project:
  - For the upgrade project to work, residents must be involved and engaged in the implementation phase.*
  - Implement the upgrade project in collaboration with residents to understand their needs and youths should be engaged to work in the project.*
- Proper awareness on the informal settlement upgrade

project must be conducted to inform the residents about the benefits and costs that the upgrade would bring:

*First create awareness about the upgrade project throughout the informal settlements so that everyone can understand what the project is all about.*

*Discuss with the residents to seek their support because several survey works have been conducted in informal settlements in the past and we were promised development but nothing was implemented.*

- There is a need to identify residents that are qualified for the issuance of land titles and provide procedures for registration of land and provision of infrastructure:

*Give land titles to people who built houses in informal settlements and have lived there for more than five years.*

*The upgrade project must be conducted in an orderly manner by developing procedures in collaboration with community leaders.*

- The most preferred infrastructure and services by residents should be established first to engender support from them:

*Piped-potable water supplied by Water PNG electricity connected by PNG Power and health care facility should be established in the informal settlements first before other infrastructure and services. However, access road conditions must be improved to facilitate the development of other infrastructure.*

### Concluding remarks

Upgrading an informal settlement by providing infrastructures and services has the potential to improve the conditions of the settlement and the welfare of residents. However, for the upgrade project to be effective and sustainable, the beneficiary communities should be involved in the planning and implementing of the project. As informal settlements often provide affordable housing for low-income households and vulnerable people, the upgrade of a settlement may result in an increase in housing price, which they may not be able to afford. Thus, the anomaly should be considered in an upgrade project by providing housing programs that can cater for housing needs of low-income households. The issuance of land titles is often part of the informal settlement upgrade processes which suggests the need to provide guidelines and requirements that residents should meet before they can be qualified for land titles. In order to avoid land grabbing of customary land, only genuine owners should be given land titles. Genuine customary landowners must be identified with an effective mechanism such as incorporated land groups registration. Residents should be well informed about

the procedures for seeking approval of building plan and registration of land as well as the costs involved. The findings from this article can assist urban development managers and land use planners in implementing informal settlement upgrade project in effective and sustainable manner.

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