Global-Local Intersections: Lessons From Slum Upgrading In Kenya – The Kisip Experience

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ABSTRACT

Kenya and other Global South countries continue to be beset with severe urban challenges despite numerous global and local efforts or intentions to decisively deal with them. These challenges, coupled with the failure to solve them, have come to be referred to as the ‘urban South crisis’, and is mainly exemplified by the continued proliferation, prominence and persistence of informal settlements as far as urban housing is concerned. In Kenya, global concerns coupled with international hegemonic interests on the one hand, and on the other hand, local political-economic agendas, local political agendas and interests have led to several national urban housing initiatives over the decades. By large, many of those prescribed initiatives have generally failed to meaningfully tackle the housing crisis as well as to attain most of their stated objectives. Moreover, according to several studies, some of these prescribed solutions have in fact worsened the situation. This has partly contributed to a series of succession of initiatives, with one of the latest being ‘The Kenya Informal Settlements Improvement Program (KISIP)’. Accordingly, this paper traces and discusses the implementation of KISIP across Kenya, in various urban areas. The study goes on to focus on a number of informal settlements that were varied in terms of their degree of acceptance/rejection and adherence to KISIP principles and the subsequent success or failure of the initiatives in those settlements, based firstly on the stated KISIP objectives and secondly on a significant improvement in the housing conditions. Consequently, with the aim of highlighting key lessons and insights, this paper is mainly reflective as it is partly based on the authors’ actual experiences and involvement in various aspects of the KISIP implementation across Kenya. This includes an appreciation of the complex intersection of international hegemonic perspectives and interests with the local ones, as well as the surrounding cultural-political-economic forces that could play a significant role in any future successful resolution of the housing crisis in urban Kenya.

Key Words: Informal Settlement; Slum Improvement; Housing programs,