

UPGRADING INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS IN JEDDAH

Informal settlements pose a complex question: how best to formalize their unofficial existence, legalize makeshift homes and provide them with appropriate infrastructure and services? Often, such settlements have simply been relocated. But UN-Habitat, recognizing that socio-economic networks have taken root in these areas, identifies participatory slum upgrading as one of the preferred strategies for achieving cities without slums. This kind of slum upgrading is an extremely complicated task and is truly participatory and effective only when it incorporates the needs of children – because communities that work for their youngest members tend to work for everyone. Space Syntax Limited, an urban planning and design consultancy affiliated with University College London, has developed an evidence-based, participatory approach to upgrading informal settlements in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Jeddah's 50-plus unplanned settlements occupy around 16 per cent of the city's area and house more than 1 million people – one third of its population. Inhabitants often lack sanitation, proper shelter and secure tenure, and they also experience inequality in the allocation of social services and amenities. Despite the challenges, these neighbourhoods do provide opportunities to prosper. Many residents are migrants who join the existing communities by setting up small businesses or working in the service industries that support the local and regional economies.

One of the biggest obstacles to developing slum infrastructure is the lack of formal land ownership. In Jeddah, the authorities are addressing this challenge through the Jeddah without Slums programme. Since 2007, this effort has been overseen by a public-private partnership, the Jeddah Development and Urban Regeneration Company (JDURC), formed specifically to facilitate legalization of land titles, improvement of local environments and increased provision of services for residents.

In their joint work, the Municipality of Jeddah, JDURC and Space Syntax have sought to address a wide range of conditions by combining scientific measurement, spatial analysis and physical intervention with community engagement and cultural considerations. Each settlement is studied, using the urban planning technique of spatial layout analysis, to understand how its problems are related to the streets, paths and other routes that knit it together and link it to the wider city. Many informal settlements are poorly connected. This complicates residents' attempts to make use of opportunities in other parts of the city and can lead to or reinforce economic exclusion, social segregation and stigmatization. Overcoming these problems involves the creation of new physical connections and the redesign of existing ones.

An upgrading plan is developed for each neighbourhood based on its unique situation and needs. These needs might

include physical changes to buildings and the public realm to improve structural soundness and comfort, or the provision of social infrastructure (such as schools and clinics) and utilities (water, energy and sewerage). In each case, care is taken to minimize the disruption caused by the construction process.

Each plan contains interchangeable options that involve greater or lesser degrees of change to the physical fabric. This allows the upgrading plan to respond to different levels and combinations of official, private-sector and community commitments of financial and political capital. Higher levels of funding allow a more complete upgrading of buildings, public realms, social infrastructure and utilities. Lower levels mean the focus will be less on individual buildings and more on shared public services (see Figure 4.3). During all stages of development, consultations are held with local residents, municipalities, traditional representatives, developers and JDURC to ensure that stakeholders are engaged and included in the upgrading process.

Child rights, unfortunately, are not always at the forefront of urban planning and – as inclusive as these stakeholder consultations seek to be – more needs to be done to listen to children's voices. The perception seems to be that conditions adequate for adults are sufficient for all. However, it is important not to treat children as a homogeneous group. Girls and boys of different ages use urban space in diverse ways, respond to it differently

and may have varying preferences and concerns regarding safety, participation, privacy and other factors. For example, small children might be happiest when they can play close to their caregivers in small spaces, but older ones will need larger spaces for activities such as ball games. Reconstruction presents an opportunity to provide children and their families with control over planning and building their environment in a way that works for them. Specific spatial design elements that need careful consideration

by planners and input from children and their families include health and safety features and accessibility.

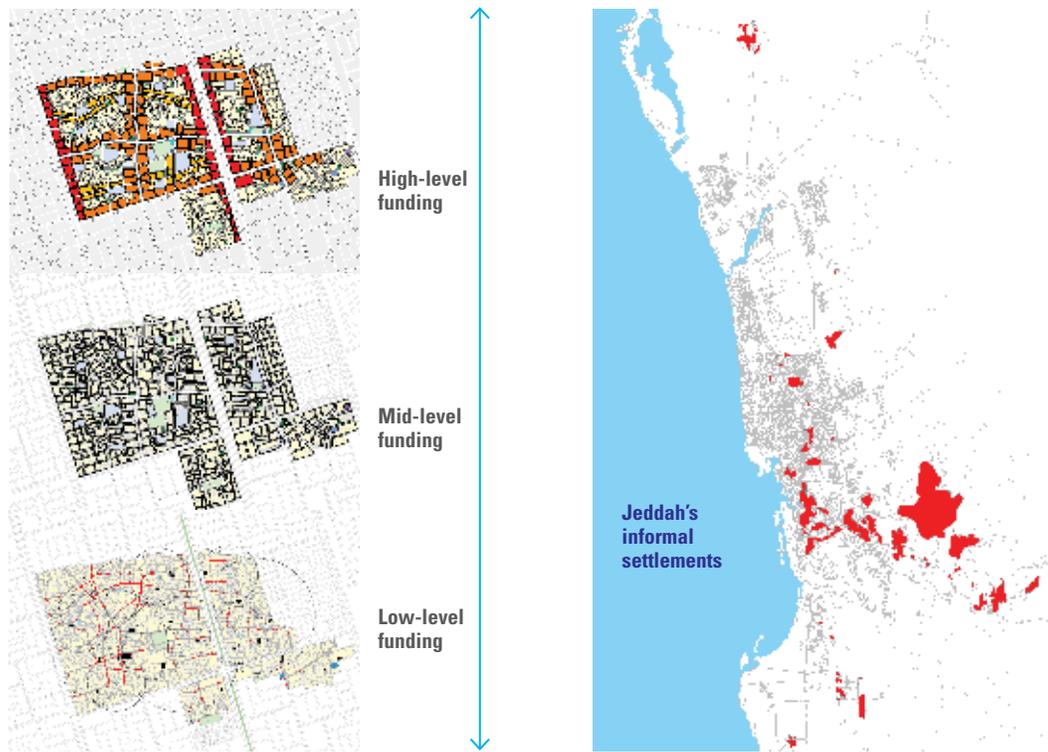
One way to facilitate children's participation as stakeholders is to ask them to collect information about their surroundings. Again, differing preferences must be considered. Some girls may be reluctant or unable to voice their opinions in a meeting where boys, men or even older women are present, for example. Children and their families can also be

included in core planning groups, where those most interested in the development of their area can represent their community and take part in decision-making.

Placing children's rights at the heart of urban policymaking, budgeting and planning would ensure that new proposals and completed projects are judged by their impact on children's lives.

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Figure 4.3. Design scenarios for an informal settlement, showing the scale of change from maximum (high-level funding) to minimum (low-level funding) intervention



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