

Chapter 6

Project Implementation Constraints with Examples from Affordable Housing and Infrastructure Efforts

Antje Ilberg

Urban Planning, Policy and Governance Consultant, Germany

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Comprehensive approaches to sustainable, affordable housing and infrastructure development often prove challenging in developing countries. Several ideas for low cost housing and infrastructure in urban Sub-Saharan Africa appear to have nearly perfect technical characteristics responding to current urban planning and development experience, but yet the project execution of these concepts reveals significant shortcomings. Additionally, the long-term effects of a project often have unintended side effects, and still, similar projects continue to be repeated. To consider these numerous aspects simultaneously is crucial for success. This chapter details three projects with potentially successful concepts for sustainable infrastructure, but which did not succeed fully due to the project framework and imperfections therein. Described are responses to common problems in Sub-Saharan Africa from Rwanda and Malawi in low cost housing, domestic infrastructure, and communal,

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decentral infrastructure, respectively. Besides describing their realistic solutions and their integration of environmental and social concerns, and despite being based on the principle of multi-level networking and support, the chapter goes beyond the technical description to analyze shortcomings and constraints of implementation. For the discussion of success factors when implementing a project, two additional best practice examples are used.

ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND

Comprehensive approaches to sustainable, affordable housing and infrastructure development often prove challenging in developing countries. Several ideas for low cost housing and infrastructure in urban Sub-Saharan Africa appear to have nearly perfect technical characteristics responding to current urban planning and development experience, yet the project execution of these concepts reveals significant shortcomings. This chapter presents potentially sustainable low cost solutions for housing and domestic infrastructure in Sub-Saharan Africa. During their implementation they each unveiled the difficulties of creating a comprehensive approach to sustainable, affordable housing or infrastructure development.

The success of housing and infrastructure projects depends on a variety of aspects. First, a project must be based on a suitable technical idea and approach. While this sounds natural, in reality there are a number of projects which lack a viable concept, and yet are well funded. Secondly, pilot projects need funding and other facilitation, even if they research and test a minimum cost solution for future implementation. Funding needs time, and project framework conditions may change before funds are finally secured and accessible. Requirements can be inflexible and rigid, and a project design may often end up different from the initial intention.

Another factor is stakeholder involvement in the conception and organization of a project. This includes the proper identification of their patterns of communication and interaction, without trying to intervene in this pattern. Personal commitment by the project manager and also by the beneficiaries is necessary: without this a pilot project cannot be successfully concluded. Skilled project management and proper accounting form part of the commitment.

Finally, government support is a prerequisite for success, and it is important to respect both, policy and legal framework in the country. When this framework contradicts the project idea, there might be room for law and regulations to be updated; if this possibility is not provided, the project should not be started.

Historically, unintended consequences of development projects are observed and analyzed, and yet similar projects are still repeated. The intended beneficiaries are sometimes not the real beneficiaries. Market eviction is a common consequence of

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