THE TRANSFORMATION OF MINIMUM STANDARD HOUSING: UPGRADING THE HOUSING STOCK IN IKAGENG

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Until recently Blacks were seen as temporary residents of "white" urban areas in South Africa. As a consequence housing provided for them was of a minimum standard, consisting primarily of mass-produced four-roomed single or semi-detached dwellings. The predominance of small uniformly designed houses resulted in a monotonous residential environment. The Black town of Ikageng (official population approximately 40 000) situated immediately west of Potchefstroom was no exception. During the last decade, however, perceptible improvement in the standard of many public sector houses in Ikageng has taken place through a process of upgrading. Since the latter half of 1986 an escalation of this process has been noticed. The aims of this paper are to determine the factors that were responsible for the improvement of low income housing in Ikageng and the escalation thereof since 1986, and to evaluate the potential role of this process in improving the quality of minimum standard dwellings in low income Black residential areas.

Swartes is tot onlangs nog beskou as tydelike inwoners van "blanke" stedelike gebiede in Suid-Afrika. As gevolg hiervan was die behuising wat aan hulle voorsien is van minimum standaard – die resultaat van die massaproduksie van veral enkel- en skakelhuise met vier vertrekke. Die oorheersing van klein eenvormig-ontwerpte huise het aanleiding gegee tot 'n eentonige residensiële omgewing. Die swart dorp Ikageng (amptelike bevolking ongeveer 40 000) wat direk wes van Potchefstroom geleë is, was geen uitsondering op die reël nie. Gedurende die afgelope dekade het daar egter 'n opvallende verbetering in die voorkoms van baie openbare sektor huise in Ikageng plaasgevind as gevolg van opgradering. Sedert die tweede helfte van 1986 is daar 'n toename in hierdie proses waargeneem. Die doel van hierdie artikel is om te bepaal watter faktore verantwoordelik was vir die verbetering van lae-inkomste behuising in Ikageng en vir die toename in die proses sedert 1986 asook om die potensiële rol wat opgradering kan speel in die verbetering van die kwaliteit van minimum standaard behuising in lae-inkomste swart residensiële gebiede te evalueer.

1. INTRODUCTION

The public housing scheme in Ikageng was initiated in the late 1950's to accommodate Blacks already residing in the area under slum conditions. Stringent influx control measures and the emphasis on homeland development limited the growth of the population of the town through to the 1970's. Provision of housing during this time was primarily for migrant labour and natural growth. The additional dwellings were of the standardised format which was introduced during the late 1950's. Up to 1970 the principle of impermanency applied to all housing provided for Blacks in the so-called "white" South Africa. All Black housing stock in white urban areas was owned by the State and rented out on a short lease basis.

In January 1976 a home ownership scheme was introduced in Black urban areas in South Africa. Participation in this scheme was initially subject to the possession of a certificate of homeland citizenship, while the right of occupation was limited to a period of 30 years. These restrictions were lifted in August 1976, however, and thereafter the 30 years would only apply to the maximum period permissible for the repayment of housing loans (Smit et al, 1986).

A 99-year leasehold system was introduced in April 1978. Although under this system Black people may own only the houses and not the land, leasehold is generally regarded as permanent ownership. Even though this system introduced a greater degree of tenurial security, leasehold registration progressed very slowly. Furthermore, prior to September 1986 the prerequisites to qualify for leasehold rights were formidable and were exacerbated by the individual rules for mortgage finance imposed by building societies (Vallum Wilkens Associates 1986, Lea, 1986). Families with rights under the 30-year home ownership scheme also found it impossible to obtain loans for upgrading and extending their houses (Lea, 1986). Under the above two schemes, however, once the home was purchased, the owner became responsible for its maintenance and was allowed to make improvements – something that was not possible before.

The Amendment Act on the Development of Black Communities (Act.74 of 1986) was promulgated in September 1986 and remains in force. Hereby right of ownership of the house and land, and the authorization of private development was created for Black urban areas in South Africa. Right of ownership was made supplementary to leasehold. The

buyer or seller has the choice to buy or sell property according to full right of ownership or leasehold. Where the establishment and development of townships for Blacks had until 15 September 1986 been a government directed action, the new approach involves a second party, namely the private sector - which includes the individual. This, in effect means that any person (regardless of race) can participate in the development of housing for Blacks (Vallum Wilkens Associates, 1986).

2. THEORETICAL RATIONALE

Upgrading has long been recognised as a means of improving the quality of the housing stock and the living conditions of the urban poor (Downs, 1976; Gale, 1980; Kirby, 1971; Mercer and Philips, 1981). The upgrading of the existing dwellings has a less disruptive effect than clearance and redevelopment on both the community and the individual household (Montero, 1968; Barnes, 1974; Hay, 1981; Seek, 1983). Upgrading of existing dwellings is also cheaper and less disruptive than moving (Bagby, 1973; Listokin, 1973; Kirby, 1979; Jackson, 1980; Seek, 1983).

Obsolescence of a dwelling is regarded as a primary factor influencing the decision to upgrade (Haas, 1962; Hendy, 1970; Listokin, 1973; Kirby, 1979). Several types of obsolescence have been identified. For instance, "style obsolescence", the declining relative value of the visual appearance of a dwelling (Meyerson et.al, 1962): "Structural obsolescence", when a dwelling becomes increasingly inadequate for habitation because of its physical deterioration (Little, 1964). Also "functional obsolescence", when a dwelling does not possess, or permit a household to possess, facilities which society regards as being essential for modern living, thereby rendering the dwelling increasingly unable to satisfy the needs of contemporary households (Kirby, 1971). Obsolescence can be regarded as a lessening of use efficiency resulting from the introduction of more fashionable residential alternatives (Cowan, 1965; Jones, 1967; Hartshorn, 1980), or from an increase in family size which gives rise to greater demands for housing space (Downs, 1977; Morris and Winter, 1978, Thorns, 1980).

The decision to upgrade a house can also result from the increasing shortage of affordable alternate housing (Maharaj, 1989). The insistence on rigid standards also makes the required housing unobtainable for the majority of low income earners who are forced into multi-occupancy with the few who have been allocated such a dwelling and can afford to pay for it (Downs, 1977; Lea, 1986).

Turner (1968), Dwyer (1979) and Rakodi (1988) stress the importance of legislation and security of tenure as prerequisites for initiation of the upgrading of dwellings in lower income neighbourhoods. Major constraints on upgrading which are indicated in the relevant literature are: features of the original dwelling (Seek, 1983), finance (Clay, 1979; Mercer and Philips, 1981), and problems associated with the enforcement of building regulations (Downs, 1969; Boaden, 1970; Hartman, 1975; Miners, 1982).

The self-help method is seen as an important means by which low income households can improve their dwellings because it is cheaper and allows low income households to improve their houses on an incremental basis as money becomes available (Clay, 1979; Dewar, 1979). According to Dewar (1979) the concept of self-help applies as long as individuals have control over the decisions concerning housing (which often means control over how money is spent), regardless of who does the actual construction.

3. COLLECTING OF DATA

The first signs of improvement to low income housing in Ikageng were noticed during the second half of the seventies. Since then the process of upgrading has gained momentum - especially after 1986. The most conspicuous improvements that were noticed consisted of more attractive front doors, larger front windows, the addition of porches, rooms, garages, carports, and inclined roofs.

Opportunity to research this phenomenon came when a survey was conducted in Ikageng by the Institute for Planning and Development of the Potchefstroom University in July 1987. Relevant questions were added to a questionnaire which was used in a random sample of 20% (1255) of the houses in the town. The questions focussed, *inter alia,* on the following issues: whether the house was upgraded, the year it was done, reasons for upgrading, types of improvements, the mode of construction, and sources of finance.

At the time of the survey 80,9% of the public sector houses in Ikageng were occupied under the 30-year home ownership scheme and 19,1% under the 99-year leasehold system. No public sector houses had at that stage been re-registered from leasehold into right of ownership. The survey revealed ignorance by the Black home owner as to what the new system implied.

Additional information regarding the yearly number and value of renovation plans approved from as far back as 1978, and the official numbers of the residential plots where improvements to the dwellings had been conducted were obtained from the town-clerk of Ikageng during December 1988.

4. RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

From the survey (20%) it was ascertained that a total of 1063 improvements had been made to the respondents' homes. Improvements included additions to existing structures and alterations (Table 1).

TABLE 1 - TYPES OF IMPROVEMENTS

TYPE	NUMBER
1 Bedroom	71
2 Bedrooms	120
3 Bedrooms	128
4 Bedrooms	73
Kitchen	89
Lounge	44
Lounge/dining room	28
Dining room	64
Bathroom	20
Bathroom/Toilet	67
Toilet	24
Garage 1	57
Garage 2	7
Front porch	56
New roof	40
Front door	46
Larger windows	129

The majority of the improvements consisted of structural additions to the houses. From the number of new rooms it is clear that the priority was to obtain

more living space generally. The fact that bedrooms are the most numerous of the new additions seems to indicate that overcrowding and the associated need for more space and privacy necessitated such changes in many cases. The improvement or addition of kitchens, dining rooms, lounges, bathrooms, and garages is in keeping with Kirby's (1971) suggestion that upgrading results when a dwelling does not possess – or permit a household to possess – facilities which society regards as being essential for modern living.

The addition of front porches, inclined roofs, more attractive front doors and larger windows clearly indicates that style obsolescence as suggested by Meyerson et al (1962), was perceived by the householders. The above-mentioned improvements were, therefore, made to improve the visual appearance of the houses.

Respondents were also requested to rank the most important factors influencing their decisions to make structural improvements to their homes (Table 2).

The rating as indicated in Table 2 clearly substantiates the foregoing deductions. It is important to note that while the desire to improve the appearance of the house was indicated as the most important reason for upgrading, the demand for more living space in itself, because of increases in family size and to accommodate other family members and lodgers, was the main motivating factor for 47% of the upgrading. Such evidence lends further support to the proposition advanced earlier in this paper that obsolescence of a house because of an increase in family size can motivate the household to upgrade the dwelling.

The high priority placed on improving the appearance of the dwelling came as somewhat of a surprise as it would be expected that the desire to obtain the maximum possible dwelling size would completely dominate the other motivating factors in a predominantly low income residential area.

Visual observations revealed that the process of upgrading is an important element which improves the quality of housing and residential neighbourhoods throughout Ikageng. This observation is substantiated by the distribution of upgraded houses of public sector design shown in Figure 1. However, as illustrated by Figure 1, areas in the western and southern parts of the town benefitted slightly more from upgrading than the rest. The distribution of upgraded houses also shows a clear tendency to cluster – indicating that upgrading tends to be contagious. Not only is there a concentration of upgraded houses in neighbouring blocks, but to a greater extent on adjoining stands within the same block. The information received from the town-clerk of Ikageng (1988) indicated that in 64,7% of the cases neighbouring houses were upgraded within the same year or during successive years.

Although the shortage of alternate dwellings was not indicated as one of the more important reasons influencing the decision to upgrade, its role as an underlying factor should not be underestimated. The continuing shortage of affordable alternate housing for the low income group in Ikageng means that the upgrading of the existing house is still the only viable alternative for most of the residents who want to improve their residential surroundings.

The majority of the respondents (82,2%) who made alterations to their homes financed the process from personal funds acquired through saving and through participation in the so-called "Thusano" scheme, whereby a number of households pool their money to enable members of their group to make alterations to their houses. A total of 9,5% made use of mortgage funds from building societies and banks, 6,5% made use of savings augmented by employer contributions, and 3,8% borrowed from friends. If Dewar's (1979) definition of self-help is accepted, the vast majority (90,5%) of the respondents made use of this method to upgrade their houses. The level of self-help varied with 39% of the households using the help of family members and friends (the so-called "Letsema scheme" whereby the participants are not paid in money for their help but are provided with food). The other 51,5% made use of small-scale contractors while they managed and administered the whole process - i.e. owner-builders.

TABLE 2 – RATING OF THE REASONS FOR UPGRADING

REASON	% OF RESPONDENTS	RATING
To improve the appearance of the house	40,0	1
To attain more living space	24,2	2
Because of an increase in family size	16,6	3
Because there is no alternative housing available	7,8	4
To accommodate other family members	5,8	5
To continue living in present surroundings	2,9	6
For long term investment	1,2	7
Cheaper to improve than buying a new house	1,1	8
To accommodate lodgers	0,4	9

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FIGURE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF UPGRADED HOUSES IN IKAGENG IN 1988.
Source: Town-clerk of Ikageng, 1988

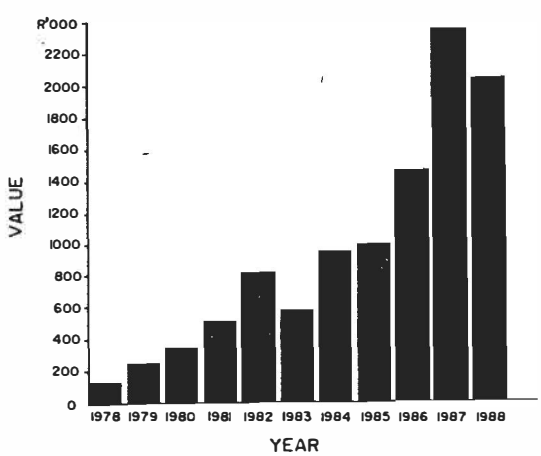

FIGURE 2: YEARLY VALUE OF APPROVED UPGRADINGS.
Source: Town-clerk of Ikageng, 1988

5. THE UPSURGE IN UPGRADING

According to the officials concerned many improvements - especially less conspicuous ones - are made without official sanction and are thus not on record.

Figure 2 shows the yearly values of officially approved upgradings of houses in Ikageng for the period January 1978 to September 1988. It is evident from Figure 2 that there was a gradual rise in the value of approved upgradings until 1986, whereafter the rise became more pronounced. This was followed by an even sharper rise in 1987. In 1988 the value of approved upgradings were slightly lower than in 1987 but still substantially higher than in 1986. Although the role of inflation must be taken into account the rise in the value of officially approved upgradings was accompanied by a marked rise in the number of building plans handed in for approval. The number of houses occupied under leasehold increased from 8,8% of the total number of public sector houses in 1985 to 15,8% in 1986, 19,1% in 1987, and 23,7% in 1988. The rate of re-registration of leasehold into rights of ownership is, however, extremely slow - although Act 74 of 1986 was directly responsible for the erection of 180 higher quality houses by the public sector in 1987 and 1988.

CONCLUSION

The process of upgrading the minimum standard public sector design housing in Ikageng is primarily the result of a demand for more housing space and the perception of functional obsolescence of the dwelling by the occupants. Upgrading plays a very important role in improving the quality of low income housing throughout the town. The obviously contagious nature of upgrading helps to ensure its continuance and results in the improvement of whole residential blocks. Participation in the ingenious Thusano and Letsema schemes enables low income families to participate in residential upgrading with very little difficulty.

Ample available evidence indicates that the willingness of householders in Ikageng to invest in improving their homes increased with successive legislation which gave them greater security of tenure. The upsurge in the amount spent

on upgrading following the promulgation of the Amendment Act on the Development of Black Communities (Act. 74 of 1986) whereby ownership was made supplementary to leasehold, substantiates this statement.

It is, however, also evident from the study that much can be done to promote the purchase of leasehold or property in Ikageng. If the security of tenure provided by leasehold and full right of ownership can be extended to the majority of Black households the upgrading of the low income housing sector can become an even greater force in improving the quality of the housing stock.

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