

Urban programming case study: Egypt

Towards Healthy, Environmental, and Safe Housing Project

Model of intervention: Addressing Urban Inequality Through Targeted Housing

Country Overview of Urban Housing

Egypt is experiencing rapid urbanization, with 43% of its population residing in urban areas as of 2021. This migration, driven by the search for better economic opportunities, has significantly impacted cities like Greater Cairo and Alexandria, which together house 56% of Egypt's urban population. Cairo alone saw an influx of half a million residents in 2017. By 2023, Egypt's urban population was around 42 million. This growth has led to a severe housing deficit of approximately 3 million units, predominantly affecting low- and middle-income groups. Informal settlements, home to nearly 20 million people, highlight the growing housing crisis. The government is addressing these issues through initiatives like the New Administrative Capital to alleviate congestion and provide new housing opportunities. Despite these efforts, challenges such as the gentrification of informal settlements and the high cost of new housing remain significant, affecting social cohesion and affordability.

Detailed Overview of Project Area/Problem

Recycling and garbage collection are the main source of income for many semi-urban areas in Greater Cairo, although it is considered a high-income business which generates an adequate income for the people working in this business. Community houses are considered the worst among others due to the severe pollution caused by the widespread recycling activities in the area, as operations are often carried out in the streets, basements, and small factories close to the homes, releasing harmful materials into the environment. This unregulated recycling process leads to significant air and soil pollution, with residents frequently exposed to toxic fumes and particles, posing serious risks to their health and well-being.

Environmental degradation also directly affects the quality of housing in the community as many homes lack basic features needed for safe and comfortable living. Insulation is particularly poor, causing extreme indoor temperatures and higher energy costs. Furthermore, the plumbing systems in these homes are often outdated or malfunctioning, resulting in frequent leaks and poor water quality. The overall construction and finishing of the houses are substandard while environmental degradation from recycling activities compounds these issues, making living conditions unsafe and unpleasant. This project addresses these deficiencies by improving housing conditions in these communities, focusing on essential upgrades like better insulation and plumbing to mitigate health risks and enhance overall living standards.

Project Intervention

The "Towards Healthy, Environmental, and Safe Housing" project, funded by Habitat for Humanity International and implemented by the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services, aims to improve housing conditions in semi-urban areas of Greater Cairo. The project offers housing loans to low-income residents for essential home upgrades. It also includes awareness campaigns on adequate housing standards and builds a community network to advocate for improved living conditions. The intervention benefits 3,000 individuals by enhancing their housing infrastructure, including better insulation, plumbing, and structural stability.

Two community committees are established to assess needs, provide technical support, and receive capacity-building training. The project also addresses social conditions by improving educational opportunities for children and ensuring

greater privacy and safety. By combining financial support with community engagement, the project fosters healthier, more sustainable living environments and strengthens community resilience.

Effect on Target Groups/Communities

The project has significantly improved living conditions for residents affected by pollution from recycling activities in Greater Cairo. Prior to the intervention, many homes lacked basic amenities such as proper insulation and functional plumbing. The provision of housing loans enabled community members to make crucial upgrades, including improved insulation, plumbing systems, and structural repairs.

These enhancements have led to better water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities, thus increasing dignity and psychological well-being. Partnerships with local leaders and community-based organizations facilitated access to housing loans, streamlining the application process and ensuring residents were well-informed. As a result, more residents could invest in their homes, improving overall quality of life. The project also supported the creation of community committees responsible for ongoing needs assessment and technical support, fostering a sense of ownership and ensuring sustainable improvements in housing conditions.

Project Innovation

This project stands out for its comprehensive approach to urban development challenges in Greater Cairo. By offering low-interest housing loans, it addresses critical issues such as poor insulation, outdated plumbing, and substandard construction, which are prevalent in semi-urban areas impacted by recycling pollution. This approach not only enhances living conditions but also mitigates health risks associated with poor air quality and inadequate sanitation, such as respiratory diseases and Hepatitis. The project's innovation lies in its holistic, community-driven strategy, integrating environmental and social dimensions.

It goes beyond traditional housing interventions by raising awareness about adequate housing standards and advocating for residents' rights. Additionally, the project builds local capacity by training community members in eco-friendly construction practices and maintenance. This empowers communities to sustain improvements, breaking the cycle of poverty and enhancing urban resilience. The model's focus on combining financial support with community engagement and environmental considerations makes it a pioneering effort in addressing the complex challenges of urban housing in Cairo.

Global relevance of community-level impact

SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being –our project has directly contributed to reducing health issues associated with poor living conditions, through providing physical security and protection, separating humans from domestically raised animals, providing a healthy environment. The improvement in public health standards supports SDG 3, which aims for good health and well-being for all.

SDG 4: Quality Education – Providing privacy spaces for family members and providing larger spaces through horizontal expansion leads to improving social conditions, including improving educational opportunities for children, aligning with SDG 4's objective to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation – The installation of the basic adequate housing qualities such as proper insulation inside their houses, adequate plumbing system, and adequate finishes, is crucial in meeting SDG 6, ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities – The project directly contributes to SDG 11 by making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. Upgrading housing and infrastructure to make them safe and sustainable is a core part of this goal.

SDG 17: Partnership– Habitat for Humanity partnered up with CEOSS, its local partner, to implement this project to provide housing loans to low-income residents, enabling them to make essential home improvements.

Moving Forward

Target Similar Urban Areas: The project can be replicated in other semi-urban areas of Cairo facing similar challenges. Adapting successful strategies to new contexts will address shared issues while ensuring culturally sensitive solutions.

Enhanced Monitoring and Evaluation: Implementing a robust MEAL system in new areas will help track progress, measure impact, and adapt strategies as needed, based on lessons learned from the current project.

Advocacy Efforts: Increased advocacy will focus on raising awareness about the importance of improved housing conditions and accessible loans. Collaborating with local leaders and policymakers will aim to influence policy changes and secure additional funding.

Support for Startups and Digital Marketplaces: Supporting innovative startups and digital marketplaces will provide new opportunities for affordable housing and streamline access to essential services, further enhancing living conditions for low-income individuals.

Next Steps and Collaboration: Potential partners are encouraged to join the initiative by offering financial support, expertise, or resources. Collaboration with local organizations, government bodies, and private sector stakeholders will be crucial for scaling and replicating the project effectively, driving meaningful change in housing conditions.

Visual Documentation

Before



After

