



« THE RESTRUCTURATION OF THE VULNERABLE NEIGHBOURHOOD OF ELMINA »

Nouakchott, Mauritania

Period of implementation: 2003 – 2007 | Study case written in 2010

The "Restructuring of the precarious El Mina district in Nouakchott (Mauritania)" project (02/2003 to 12/2007) aimed at improving living conditions in the precarious El Mina neighbourhood by enhancing its level of equipment and accelerating the integration of its urban population in the formal structures of the town. The main objectives were: infrastructure and basic facilities (roads, schools, clinics, markets, fountains, etc.) in the area; ensure security of tenure to occupants of the neighbourhood; provide access to decent housing; relocate people in previously prepared areas. The preparation and implementation of the project several other stakeholders alongside the Mauritanian government (supported by its ministerial departments and institutions concerned: CDHLCPI and AMEXTIPE) of the Urban Community of Nouakchott and the World Bank, including (i) local authorities (Prefect and Mayor) (ii) representatives of populations (iii) and the NGOs present in the town.



The **Inclusive Cities Observatory** was launched in 2008 by the UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights with the aim of creating a space for analysis and reflection on local social inclusion policies. The initiative was developed with the scientific support of Professor Yves Cabannes (University College of London) and the Centre for Social Studies (CES) from the University of Coimbra. At present, the Observatory contains more than sixty study cases mostly developed between 2008 and 2010. Even though many of these cases refer to policies that have already come to an end, they still have much to offer: from capitalizing on the learning acquired by other local authorities to discovering suggestive and alternative means to address social inclusion challenges from a local perspective.

Context

City context

For several decades Nouakchott, the capital of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, has known urban growth and settlement dynamics that have continuously reinforced its weight and its role in the urban armature of the country. At present, Nouakchott has 800,000 inhabitants, which makes up one fourth of the total population of the country (estimated at 3.2 million) and half of its urban population.

In spite of decreasing migration flows during the past decade, the Mauritanian capital has continued to represent a focal point for contemporary changes and transformations in the country. The annual growth rate remains high at 3% and is characterized by an extremely young population – 50% are younger than 20 years and 51% are girls. This matches a general demographic profile in which 39% of the population is aged between 0 and 16 years (UN Data Country Profile Mauritania).

Thus, Nouakchott has become the main urban pole of attraction. Its initial administrative functions have been complemented by an economic role, which has consolidated its status as centre of the redistribution of national wealth. The city concentrates more than 50% of the manufacturing industry, 80% of building and public works companies, and more than 60% of administrative positions and collective services, such as banks, financial institutions, etc. The capital's superiority is most visible in the field of education and public health as it concentrates about 70% of the sanitary structures and practically the totality of higher education institutions. In spite of this strong domination, opportunities for formal employment remain scarce and unemployment rates are high at about 30% of the active population (PNUD et OMD en Mauritanie 2010: 3).

Governmental decentralization context

Similar to other towns in Mauritania, Nouakchott is evolving within a context of advanced decentralization, which grants its elected representatives and local authorities important responsibilities in the field of urban development. Decentralization policy was started quite early in 1986. The first text on decentralization was prescription 86134 of 13 August 1986. It was replaced by prescription 87289 on 20 October 1987. This text created the foundations for the powers of local authorities, providing them with moral responsibility and financial autonomy. In a voluntary fashion, the State delegated extensive powers to the *communes*, which were created progressively. Thus, in 1986, the 13 administrative centres of the *Wilaya* (regions) were transformed into municipalities, with extensive powers in administration and management, while only being subject to limited tutelage.

In 1987, this experience was extended to the 32 administrative centres of the *moughataa* (districts) and, in 1988, the entire country was subdivided in 216 *communes*. In 1995, the government of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania adopted a declaration of municipal development. The communes were instituted as local authorities provided with moral personality and financial autonomy. They became responsible for important parts of the organization, management, and operation of local authorities. This declaration of municipal policy stresses a general objective residing in the will to promote the exercise of democracy, on the one hand, and stimulate local development through the implementation of participative methods in favour of the good management of public affairs, on the other hand (UCLG 2008: 42).

This major objective can be understood as the will of public powers to create conditions allowing communes to increase their financial capacities and to monitor the execution of investment programmes focused on the creation, the rehabilitation, and the upkeep of urban infrastructure.

Recently, in April 2010, the government adopted a declaration on decentralization and development policy and subsequently created a fund for the financing of the development of local authorities called Regional Fund for Development (Fonds Régional de Développement [FRD]). Its objective is to contribute and reinforce the financial transfer from the state to the communes in order to improve the provided resources and promote the access of their populations to basic public services.

Institutional level of policy development: Sub municipal, Municipal, National, and Intercommunal (multiple communities).

Social context

Rapid and uncontrolled urbanization has created a flagrant dualism opposing spaces divided into plots and constructed in hard materials in the centre and mostly unauthorised, recent developments forming a belt of poverty in peripheral 'squatted' spaces. The irregular neighbourhoods of Nouakchott are all confronted with the same reality characterized by an extreme under-integration, which maintains its populations in a situation of absolute dependence with respect to the contiguous, better equipped zones of the city. The totality of these peripheral neighbourhoods suffers from weakness in services and insufficiency, or even absence, of basic infrastructures. The result is extremely precarious living conditions with respect to hygiene and housing. In 2000, the population of these neighbourhoods was estimated at 108,351 inhabitants (21,335 households or 18.06% of the city) distributed over 800 ha. In 2008, the number was 194,000 inhabitants (38,800 households, or 24.25% of the total population of the city) occupying 1072 ha.

The main shantytown of the capital in 2000, the *kebbé* (literally meaning 'garbage dump') *d'El Mina* was first established in the early 1970s in the neighbourhood El Mina in southwestern Nouakchott. At this time, the effects of chronic drought affecting all of Sahel were already being felt. The neighbourhood became a home to the greater part of new arrivals in the capital, but also to some of the people that had been driven away from other districts (*moughataa*). Many of the households that had been subject to residential improvement schemes chose to settle down here, rather than occupy the lots that had been provided for them, which they considered too far away from their place of work.

The neighbourhood spread out and at the end of the 1990s it had a population of about 50,000 inhabitants settled on 120 ha. The strong density (400 habitants/ha.), the extreme precariousness of living conditions (lack of infrastructure), and the absence of land tenure have kept the neighbourhood and its inhabitants in a situation of the most absolute poverty for many years. This is reflected on the national level where poverty rates have only slowly been declining from 56.6% in 1990 to 42% in 2008 (PNUD et OMD en Mauritanie 2010: 3). Legal precariousness was reinforced by economic conditions with a low level of revenues and access to basic services: surveys done at that time indicate that half of the working population had a temporary job earning about 30,000 UM per month (about 76 euros/month). This salary served to provide for an average household of five people of which expenses were divided up as follows: 60% food, 10% domestic energy and lighting, 10% water, 5% transport, 5% health, 5% schooling, and 5% for other expenses such as ceremonies and upkeep of the house. Only 30% of male household heads declared having a source of fixed revenue, as compared to 8% of women who, however, represent 55% of household heads.

In order to slow down the growth of this kind of space and its social consequences, public authorities have elaborated a programme entitled 'Supply of basic infrastructure in Nouakchott' within the Programme for Urban Development. The program seeks to provide services and infrastructure to the marginalized neighbourhoods. The program also forms part of the objective of reducing poverty based on the Strategic Plan on the Struggle Against Poverty (CSLP), elaborated for the period from 2001 to 2015.

Policy development

The restructuring of the precarious neighborhood El Mina was part of the administration's strategy to clean-up an unhealthy housing environment which had increasingly become associated with the zones of poverty surrounding the capital. Started as a pilot project, this operation was supported and administrated by Program for Urban Development (PDU Crédit 3574-MAU) initiated in 2001 with funding from the World Bank. The operation basically aimed at: (a) building infrastructure, such as roads, schools, clinics, markets, standpipes, etc.; (b) guaranteeing secure land titles to the residents of the neighborhood; (c) providing access to decent housing; and (d) resettling households in previously prepared and equipped zones.

Background

The restructuring operation of El Mina was a pilot project implemented in the framework of the restructuring of precarious neighborhoods in Nouakchott, which was supported and administrated by the Central Government through the Program for Urban Development (PUD), a program initiated in 2001 with funding from the World Bank. Supported with \$70 million, this program concerned operations in Nouakchott and regional capitals between 2001 and 2006. The realization of the project involved the setting up of an inter-ministerial committee and a steering committee.

Policy objectives

The main objectives were to: build basic infrastructure in the neighborhood, such as roads, schools, clinics, markets, and standpipes; provide secure land titles to residents; facilitate access to decent housing; and resettle residents in previously prepared zones. More detailed objectives were established after a first survey and following the recommendations of the steering committee. Their implementation was influenced and modified by the changes occurring within the neighborhood during the 5 years the project lasted, which particularly concerned the arrival of new populations. These changes gave rise to numerous conflicts and reinforced the importance of structures of mediation and information.

Chronological development and implementation of the practice

The operation was implemented in two phases:

A first phase, designated as the 'servicing phase', was aimed at supplying the neighborhood with basic public infrastructure. The implementation of this phase was associated with a series of preliminary technical studies, but also an extensive survey of eligible households and the precise identification and resettlement of populations living on the tracts of land set aside for future public infrastructure. This phase (1) conducted a general census of the residents of the neighborhood; (2) identified the households living on areas reserved for streets and future public infrastructure; (3) elaborated a Resettlement Action Plan (RAP); (4) did a social impact study of the project; and (5) did the technical studies of the infrastructures to be built for the project.

All these operations were conducted and concluded before the end of the year 2004, which implied the construction of the following infrastructure: 1 health center, 2 neighborhood markets, 5 elementary schools (30 classrooms), 3 secondary schools (30 classrooms), 10 blocks of public latrines, 2450 cesspools for family latrines, 16 km of roads of which 7 were paved, and 3 parking lots.

At the end of 2004 and after the opening of the main channels, the second phase of the operation called the "Land consolidation phase" was launched. This phase dealt with tenure security for people living within the square defined by the roads released during the servicing operation. The operation involved a "readjustment of household occupation" in relation to a subdivision plan prepared for each square. The new aspect of the approach has required conducting a "trial run" on two squares to establish the rules and procedures of intervention before spreading it throughout the area.

Stakeholders, beneficiaries and participatory methodologies

Agents involved

The preparation and implementation of the project involved several leading actors; there is of course the Mauritanian Government (through ministerial departments and governmental institutions) and the urban community of Nouakchott in partnership with the World Bank.

Other members were quickly associated with different phases of the preparation and implementation of the project, either in relation to the technical skills they are likely to bring in, or because of their knowledge of the local conditions and context to give the operation every chance of success. Thus the following players have been full partners in the project:

- CDHLC / I (Commission for Human Rights, the Fight against Poverty and Integration), and it is this structure that will accompany the project beneficiaries on the issue of "improving habitat" through the Twize programme;
- AMEXTIPE Mauritanian Agency for the Execution of Works of Public Interest for Employment: This is the agency that will be responsible for carrying out the scheduled construction works
- Local authorities (Prefect and Mayor);
- Representatives of populations, and
- NGOs present in the commune. Peoples' representatives and NGOs in the commune will participate in the awareness-raising and information of the beneficiary populations. They will also support the Commission of Allocation and Compensation in the handling of disputes.

Beneficiaries

The project beneficiaries are the population residing in the district in 2002 which is estimated at about 50,000. Indirectly, all peripheral areas neighbouring the district receive indirect benefits related to the investment made particularly in the expansion of road and electricity networks but also by enhancing the level of equipment

Participation processes implemented

The beneficiaries of the project were closely associated with the project from preparation to implementation. This participation was effective in involving the designated representatives of

the population in the different stages of the preparation (survey and identification of households to be moved) and the performance of the project (effect on batches and search for solutions to problems and disputes encountered).

Furthermore, a process of effective participation of people's representatives in the decision-taking was experienced through the creation of a Commission of Attribution and Compensation (CAC). Chaired by the Hakem (Prefect), the Commission included 15 representatives of the populations targeted by the project, including 4 women, and representatives of all institutions and organizations involved in the implementation of the project: Ministry of Equipment and Transport, Ministry of Finance, CDHLCPI, NGOs active in the area, the Urban Development Agency having been responsible for the project.

The representatives of the population were selected on the basis of leadership: there was a zonal subdivision in the neighbourhood implemented in the 1980s to guide people through the "structures of mass education." It was the translation of the political view of power of the time to involve all segments of Mauritanian society in the choices made by the central government. This work was made on the identification and accountability of the leaders who would serve as local contacts. These people eventually prevailed and were recognized in the neighbourhood. This has been both an advantage and a handicap:

- An advantage because they are the best informed and those most listened to and able to mobilize crowds for unforeseen events;
- A handicap because there was a form of "negative solidarity" when dealing with contentious cases or the approval or non-approval of the eligibility of a particular household.

The CAC had not only the responsibility of choosing the eligibility criteria for being relocated, of validating the assignment of plots and of examining claims and disputes, but also that of ensuring the optimization of travel, preserving the pre-set links with the neighbourhood as far as possible. Beyond the institutionalization of a formal framework that helped bring in the field stakeholders, the commission gave the opportunity to share responsibilities and affirmed the role of each stakeholder.

The CAC met whenever it was necessary. It also held a meeting at least once a month for the purpose of information and ongoing awareness-raising of populations on interventions that were underway.

Institutionalizing and financing

The restructuring of the precarious neighbourhood of El Mina is a pilot project selected as part of the strategy of restructuring the precarious neighbourhoods of Nouakchott, backed and supported by the Central Government through the Urban Development Program (UDP) initiated in 2001 with support from the World Bank. This program, with an amount of U.S. \$ 70 million covered the achievements targeted for Nouakchott and regional capitals between 2001 and 2006.

The intervention in El Mina required the establishment of an inter ministerial committee chaired by the Prime Minister and responsible for (i) defining the restructuring strategy, responsibilities and for setting budgets for different tasks (ii) supervising the operation and coordinating the various stakeholders. This inter ministerial committee consisted of: The Minister of Home Affairs, Post and Telecommunications, The Minister of Finance, The Minister of Equipment and Transport, and the President of the Urban Community of Nouakchott.

The inter ministerial committee was supported by a steering committee consisting of: the Department of Housing and Urban Development of the Ministry of Equipment and Transport, the Department of Surveying and Mapping of the Ministry of Equipment and Transport; Domains Management of the Ministry of Finance, the Coordination Unit of the Urban Development Program, the Urban Development Agency, the Urban Community of Nouakchott, the Prefecture or Moughatta of El Mina, and the council of El Mina.

Based on the recommendations of the technical committee, the inter ministerial committee had chosen for the implementation of the operation: direct access to the land: allocation of non transferable land; compensation up to 70,000 UM per household (about 200 Euros / household) to cover the travel expenses of the members of the precarious habitat. Help for access to decent housing was implemented through a specific Twize programme.

Financing

The operation was financed within the framework of the first phase of the Urban Development Plan with IDA funds for an amount of approximately €12 million. The Mauritanian Government bore the cost of the support programme with a budget of around 2 million Euros to cover moving expenses for 9,000 displaced households and their participation in the social housing program (Twize).

Outcomes and reflections

Key results and achievements

The performance of this project in less than a decade profoundly changed the image, perception and the conditions of occupancy of the area. Beyond improving people's access to equipment and basic infrastructure, the project helped to secure the occupation of the area by the completion of the public lighting of the main roads and the installation of major utilities. This is what explains the attraction to the neighbourhood of new categories of people.

Similarly, the pilot trial resulted in (i) the acquisition of a method of approach and testing of specific tools for intervention in disadvantaged neighbourhoods (ii) the reconciliation of certain central governments through coordination their interventions on a specific case (iii) the acceleration of the development of the area by the emergence of a multitude of small business activities, crafts and services.

Overall assessment and replicability or adaptation elsewhere

Main obstacles

However, many obstacles had to be overcome to ensure success in a complex operation. The complexity of the operation lay in the nesting effect of several tasks: preliminary developments of reception areas, social identification engineering, transfer and accompanying households and physical realizations of equipment and infrastructure.

A major difficulty occurred from the start of the operation in relation to the difference between the census date and the effective implementation of the project. The 5-year period between these two dates led to the change in the situation of the neighbourhood (new situation of occupation and implementation of strategy to circumvent the conditions laid down ...). This situation resulted in an increase in the number of disputes, claims and contests to be treated by the CAC. The transition from one phase to another showed the importance of communication (level and nature of the information to be passed), but also the need to carefully set the

eligibility conditions of eligibility. In addition, this operation was very cumbersome in terms of resource mobilization and strict respect for the guidelines of the funder including those relating to involuntary population displacement.

Replicability or adaptation of policy elsewhere

The replication and/or adaptation of the practice experienced in Nouakchott as part of the restructuring of the precarious neighbourhood of El Mina must necessarily be based on compliance with a series of conditions that we identified during the project:

- Careful preparation upstream and involvement of all players in the field;
- Inform and educate about the project, which entails carefully defining the type of information to be provided;
- Precise and transparent identification of eligible households;
- Mobilization of resources needed for the implementation of the operation;
- Setting and respect of intervention deadlines;
- Minimization of the time between the identification of eligible households and the actual start of operations;
- Establishment of an autonomous structure for dispute mediation and resolution;
- The surveys conducted as part of project preparation revealed (i) the importance of women heads of households (ii) the strength of solidarity in such neighbourhoods (iii) the dominant role of women in all these land issues - hence the need to involve them;
- Importance of not changing the rules laid down at the start of the operation to avoid misunderstandings and to ensure compliance;
- Take into account the propensity for fraud: bypass/diversion of the rules of the game, and;

Need for special attention and specific support to individuals (or households) that are most vulnerable (elderly, disabled, etc.).

Further information

This case was researched and written by Dr. Isakha Diagana, Urban Planning Expert, under the supervision of Dr. Clemens Zobel at the Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra, Portugal, in 2010.

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