

Towards an Alternative Strategy to Rehousing for the Resorption of Slums in Algeria

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Abstract

The Algerian city, like many other countries, does not escape the slums problem and informal housing, which has grown considerably in recent decades. These slums are the result of galloping urban growth and poor urban and institutional management policies.

The fear of its consequences has led since the beginning of the 90s to the implementation of a strategy based essentially on the rehousing initiated by the State aiming at acting on the precarious housing and at the same time on the mechanisms generating these situations, but this intervention strategy, carried out until now, has been crowned by a failure on all levels and in particular that of the social integration of the populations resulting from the slums.

According to the latest UN-Habitat report, North Africa is the only sub-region in the developing world where the number (8.7 million) and proportion of slum dwellers has been steadily decreasing (13-20%). Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia have been the most successful countries in this regard.

We will attempt through this paper to find alternative solutions that are part of a forward-looking vision of sustainable development, to the actions towards slums in Algeria while relying on a method based on two components: the first concerns the analysis of a concrete example of slum located in the district of bardo in Constantine, the policy of eradication and relocation of its inhabitants to the new city of Constantine and the environmental impacts that have followed following this action. A second part will be based on an analogical approach of "best practice cases", will highlight some successful examples where: upgrading, restructuring, and rehabilitating slums are the actions to follow. All this will be done with a view to drafting a framework of actions likely to shed light on the current situation of the Bardo and other slums in Algeria.

Key words: alternative strategies, precarious housing, rehousing, resorption, slums.

INTRODUCTION

On a global scale, accelerated urbanization and changes in institutional perimeters have favored a resurgence and diversification of the forms of precarious housing and inadequate housing. We take as our starting point the observation made by the latest UN report: "Slum dwellers make up 78.2% of the urban population of the least developed countries and one third of the world's urban dwellers (...) 85% of the inhabitants of Third World cities have no legal title to property".

Almost 1 billion people, or 32 per cent of the world's urban population, live in slums, the majority of them in the developing world, compared with 760 million in 2000 and 650 million in 1990. The proportion of the urban population living in slum conditions in urban areas was particularly high in sub-Saharan Africa (62 percent) and, to a lesser extent, in Southern Asia (35 percent), compared with 24 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean, and 13 percent in North Africa (UN-Habitat 2014).

Faced with the growth of this phenomenon, the United Nations Habitat Organization has underlined the dangers that arise from this phenomenon, especially in the southern countries where the number of people living in slums may increase from 1 billion today to 2 billion by 2030(UN-Habitat 2012).

According to a definition of the UN, slums are characterized by one or more of the following for its inhabitants: lack of access to clean water and or sanitation facilities, overpopulation, poor building structures and an insecure status of residence (UN in (Hartig, Friesen, et Pelz 2019)), in addition, slums are generally characterized by the following elements: poor and fragile neighborhoods, weak basic infrastructure, very inadequate social services, environmental degradation, complex land tenure structures. Also, the deterioration of security and the invasion of violence and crime(El Kadi 1997). Those areas are also recognized for their fear and violence-filled atmosphere (Bloom, Canning, et Fink 2008).

(Arimah et Branch 2011) mention that there appears to be a dearth of awareness of the factors that contribute to the spread of slums in emerging countries. In this respect, (UN-Habitat 2003) notes that: "... the phenomenon of slums and related problems are generally little understood, and that public interventions more often than not address the symptoms rather than the underlying causes".

Algeria: Precarious Housing, a Convoluting Issue

In 2007 the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHU) recorded more than half of million (553,441) units of slums in the country. *"The number is quite large and the consequences will be more tragic"* (Lamri et al, 2020). Algerian authorities have issued a national alert to combat this precarious housing phenomena, pledging to use all financial, material, and human resources at their disposal to abolish these unhealthy buildings and provide a dignified living for this group of people (Naceur, 2013). However, according to a research undertaken by the (Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, 1998), this operation was both costly and inefficient for the public purse. *"In the policy of improving precarious housing. About 10 years ago and again in June 1996, the GoA (Government of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria) attempted to eradicate precarious housing mainly in the Algiers region. But this policy proved to be costly and inefficient; population displacement strategies were not satisfactory, and slums continued to grow"*.

Following the example of developing countries, Algerian cities are characterized by a galloping urbanization linked to the demographic pressure combined with different phases of rural exodus, a difficult economic context, absence of urban planning strategy (delay in the achievements and lack of precision), failure in the real estate market (control and distribution), and the question of governance producing a real dysfunction whose main expression is revealed by large sectors of precarious housing considered as a symbol of bad urban development, and constituting by the same token a real system of housing production, which calls for a reflection and innovative approaches requiring a global and specific treatment. Indeed, (Srivastava & Singh, 1996) emphatically state that: "Migration from rural areas is the root cause of increasing slums".

Only One Way to Reduce Slum Housing in Algeria: Rehousing

The fear of these consequences, has led since the beginning of the 90s to the implementation of a strategy based essentially on the rehousing financed at 100% by the public treasury, without any form of direct or indirect involvement of the beneficiary populations. This systematic solution led by the state is due essentially to the oil rent. (Safar Zitoun, 2011). The local authorities are in fact responsible for identifying the forms of precariousness in their municipality, and for listing the families in order to be included in the list of rehousing projects via the wilaya (housing and urban planning departments). The rehousing sites are generally located on the outskirts of the cities, when the land available allows it.

The Eradication of the Slum of Bardo in Constantine: The Underbelly of a Losing Operation

It is within the framework of the project of modernization of the Constantine metropolis PMMC, that the project of eradication of the slum of Bardo was initiated.

It is a major modernization operation of this district which is located in the immediate vicinity of downtown Constantine. It is juxtaposed to the original core of the city, that is to say that it is adjacent to the medina, the rock.

Therefore, this district can be considered as being in the city center because no limit or barrier (physical, economic, urban...) is interposed between it and the medina.

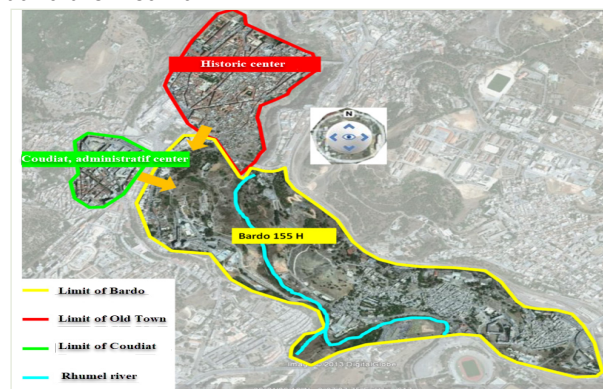


Figure 1. The Bardo district and its junctions with the medina (historical center) and the Coudiat (administrative district). (Boudjadja, 2014)

Urban Evolution of the Bardo District

- The Bardo district served for the Bey Ahmed, as a space: hosting his Gardens, and his stables between 1826-1837.
- It is during the colonial period and particularly between 1837-1930 that Bardo developed around the stables of the Ottoman governor called the “bey” and was invested by the cattle and flea markets, the fodder park, the slaughterhouse, and the farms. It also received the military barracks, dwellings, stores and the nursery.
- From 1930, Bardo became the receptacle of the rural exodus. Precarious housing appeared along the banks of the Rhumel and became more pronounced after Algeria’s independence.



Figure 2. The slum of Bardo before its eradication



Figure 3. Interior view of the neighborhood.

Source: (Boudjadja, 2014)

- The site has subsequently hosted the facilities essential to urban life (school facilities, health and worship, civil protection branches, OPGI.), a bus station, a clinic, industrial and craft activities. (Belabed-Sahraoui, 2011).

The Bardo development project was preceded by a large, monumental infrastructure and communication project of 1200 meters in length, whose work began in 2010. The Trans-Rhumel Viaduct contributes to the fluidity of the traffic of the agglomeration and to ensure a better mobility of the population between the western and eastern banks of the Rhumel wadi.

The Algerian authorities carried out an action of demolition of the precarious housing within this district in 2008, the relocation of 2513 families to the new city of Constantine has allowed the recovery of 70 ha intended for an urban project to “*decongest the center, reconcile the city with its Wadi, founding and structuring element, and renew the urban landscape along the banks in a perspective of reorienting the urban development to the south-east and to glue the urban fragments by a new coherent structure*” (argument of the Workshop, 2009).

METHODS

We will attempt to find alternative solutions that are part of a forward-looking vision of sustainable development, to the actions towards slums in Algeria while relying on a method based on two components: the first concerns the analysis of a concrete example of slum located in the district of Bardo in Constantine, the policy of eradication and relocation of its inhabitants to the new city of Constantine and the social impacts that have followed following this action. A second part will be based on an analogical approach of “*best practice cases*”, will highlight some successful examples where: upgrading, restructuring, and rehabilitating slums are the actions to follow. All this will be done with a view to drafting a framework of actions likely to shed light on the current situation of the Bardo and other slums in Algeria.

The Policy of Relocation / Rehousing of the Inhabitants of the Bardo, an Alternative Not Always Winning!

In Constantine, following the proliferation of spontaneous and precarious neighborhoods with irregular occupation and informal and/or illegal practices, concrete systematic actions have been undertaken to regularize the situation of these disadvantaged populations, the rehousing wanting to ensure the right to suitable housing with better living conditions for all, the economic ease of the country and the oil rent easily allow it, without looking for other alternatives more concerned with the social integration of the inhabitants

Table 1. Summary of rehousing operations carried out in the Bardo district.

Title of the operation	Date of relocation	Number of families to be rehoused initially	Number of families to be rehoused after appeal	Family welcome site New Town A. M.	
				Neighborhood Unit No.	N° Block
Bardo 1st	January 2008	578	702	1	1-2-3-4
				7	4
				9	3-4
Bardo 2nd	August 2008	365	431	1	1-2-3-4
				8	5
				2	2-4-5.
				9	2-3-4
Bardo 3rd	December 2008	99	110	1	4

Source : (OPGI, 2009)

The new residents of the new city do not yet have a generic name, no citizenship of their own, and yet very particular characteristics: they come for the most part from former slums of Constantine, its old city or places threatened by landslides. The action of the authorities has been decisive according to the socio-economic emergencies of the moment. However, one of the major failures of the public authorities was their inability to build social unity and a collective identity within this new city.

The transfer of this population took place in an under-equipped environment, far from the city center and, above all, very poorly connected to it - hence the feeling of relegation of the new inhabitants. This transfer was also, and above all, marked by a very specific spatial distribution of the relocated population, which consisted of a grouping in each residential block of families coming from the same neighborhood of origin (Lakehal & Kherouatou, 2021).

The relocated inhabitants show a certain anxiety about a lost past and a blurred future, after having disrupted their landmarks, modifying the frameworks of belonging in which they have organized themselves, and the greater the number of inhabitants, the more multiple the needs are: *“public spaces, real streets with sidewalks, squares lined with stores, arcades for shelter [...] a garden along which to stroll or have lunch, a market for shopping; places for meetings and exchanges, animated in the evening as well as during the day [...] well-planted trees, properly placed streetlights, well-treated fences...”* (Makhloufi, 2005), Everything that had been totally neglected.

Little listened to and little integrated into the decisions that concern them, the inhabitants have undertaken to defend what they came here for: the identity of the neighborhoods and a rewarding living environment. This type of structure had, until then, no legitimacy to express and defend collective interests, and this exclusion even pushed them to confine themselves to a protesting attitude. Worse still, an aggressive attitude: urban violence, gang warfare between former slum dwellers, kidnapping, crimes, etc.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The New City of Constantine: an Alarming Social Crisis!

The inhabitants of the slums and precarious neighborhoods represent a significant portion of the population of Constantine's new city. Of its 30,000 housing units, more than 10,000 have been assigned to them, which represents a population estimated at 50,000 people. Out of the twenty neighborhood units (NU) that the new city has, ten of these units have received populations from precarious neighborhoods and five have been exclusively reserved for them (Benlakhlef & Bergel, 2016).

The public authorities believed that the new city was safe from the problems common to the city of Constantine. However, this is not the case; this new entity is showing weaknesses with the appearance of neighborhoods in difficulties, for which solutions have not yet been found. The general trend is clear: 5,831 dwellings granted to families in eradicated slums, 1,165 dwellings for victims of dilapidated buildings and 1,121 dwellings allocated to families evacuated from landslide sites, leading to the emergence of neighborhoods with a concentration of economic and social disadvantages. The result is an area of socio-economic fragility where two types of manifestations emerge, one urban, the other social,

with inevitable transformations and changes in the neighborhood units combining economic difficulties (unemployment, very low income) and increasing social differences (lifestyles).

The Inhabitants Prefer to Return to their Slums!

The violence and uninterrupted clashes between residents from the slums of Oued El Had and those of FedjErrih , both grouped in a single neighborhood unit, have caused damage to several buildings in view of the traces of Molotov cocktails. The stones and other scrap metal that litter the roadways are there to testify. This is the daily image of the new city of Constantine!

The inhabitants were certainly happy to have acquired decent housing, but without a minimum of security, they preferred to return to their slums, at least they had their lives saved! They can't even work anymore, because they are forced to watch their homes.

The example of the displacement of the inhabitants of the slum of Bardo in Constantine towards the new city is particular, and held all our attention, because for the first time in Algeria the inhabitants claim their return towards the source: the slum! This reality has pushed us to convert a hypothesis into a certainty: the production of architecture and urban planning in the new city of Constantine has experienced a terrible failure, it has reached a level where even the slum has been qualified as better quality, reflecting the dignity of its inhabitants!

In this sense, how can we consider the slum as an opportunity to be developed? How to rehabilitate its image to integrate it into the functioning of the existing city? Assuming that Algeria will fall into an economic crisis in the coming decades, and will not find enough resources to finance the creation of new cities to house the slum dwellers, what would be the alternative? The ideal solution in this case would be to develop the slums.

For this reason, we have chosen to mention some emblematic examples:

Morocco through the Cities Without Slums Program

In Morocco, nearly 3 million people, or 10% of the population, live in slums (UN-HABITAT, 2011). With the rural exodus, unhealthy slums have grown up around cities. The French Development Agency (AFD) supports the "City without Slums" program launched by the Moroccan authorities with the objective of completely eradicating slums by 2012.

This said, what preceded this royal initiative, raises the insufficiencies of the strategies of resorption through revealed constraints such as:

- Ad hoc interventions and the lack of a global vision of the city,
- Financial deficit and resources limited to the state budget and funds collected from beneficiaries,
- Lack of an adequate housing offer with the financial capacities of the populations concerned,
- Weakness of the control and the non-dissuasive character of the sanctions,
- The problem of public land allocated to social housing,
- The lack of an institutional framework for partnership with local authorities.

Cities without Slums Program: The Foundation of a New Approach

The constraints listed above have led to a new approach initiated by the King of Morocco, aimed at stopping the proliferation through legal texts and through the simplification of procedures and deadlines. This in addition to the promotion of Social Housing, the mobilization of public land, the partnership with the private sector and the extension of micro-credit to social housing.

The programming was done on the basis of the uniqueness of the city, through a conventional framework with shared responsibilities: Local Authority, Local Communities, population concerned and Ministry in charge of Housing and Urbanism. It should be noted that this Cities Without Slums Program benefits from the financial support of the European Union, the EIB, the AFD and the institutional and technical support of the World Bank, USAID, Cities Alliances and the French Cooperation.

The actions launched and carried out during this Program present an evolving experience that has made it possible, on the one hand, to decently house a considerable slum population (nearly 8,400 families in two of the largest and oldest

slums in Casablanca: Karyan Thomas (2,405 households) and Douar Skouila (6,077 households) (Baverel, 2008). On the other hand, it constitutes a real training school for public operators, due to the numerous innovations that all actors have experienced in various fields (technical-financial set-up, technical and financial management, cost recovery, mode of intervention, mode of financing etc.).

This Cities Without Slums Program has combined several modes of intervention in the city of Casa Blanca:

- Part of the households is rehoused in the form of a drawer operation in situ: a group of shacks is evacuated, the land is freed up and equipped after restructuring the existing plot of land, which has allowed the resettlement of another part of the households, and so on.
- Another part is moved in the form of resettlement on an “integrated urban pole” such as Essalam Al Loghlam, located on the eastern outskirts of the city.

This resorption is designed to rehouse two families in the same lot in four-story buildings (R+3), through a housing financing scheme involving a “third party partner” (Baverel, 2008):

- The two beneficiary households (called binomials) associate with an “associated third party” (promoter, homeowner,) and sign a contract in which the associated third party commits to finance and build the housing for the two families and in return gets the other two floors (R+1).
- A social support approach is put in place to facilitate the operations and the adhesion of the target populations either by “Al Omrane” directly, or from contracts signed with different social operators (Social Development Agency, design offices).

Faced with the difficulties of moving populations and the problems of land shortage and urban design, integrated programs have been set up, combining both,

- A policy of rehousing in collective housing (to reduce the constraint related to the exhaustion of land reserves),
- A restructuring policy (to avoid social impacts: no displacement of population, safeguarding the neighborhood, etc.),
- A policy of resettlement on equipped lots to reduce the time required for completion and to remove the scourge from the existing urban fabric as soon as possible.

The involvement of the various actors and the populations concerned reveals considerable achievements such as

- Synergy with the concerned ministerial departments as well as the support of local elected officials,
- Mobilization of public operators (Holdingd’Aménagement Al OMRANE, ERACs),
- The positive impact of the program on NGOs and the support of international organizations,

Several aspects temper this assessment, both generally and specifically, namely:

- Disparity between cities and regions in the process of support and accompaniment,
- The non-conformity of the transfer and demolition rates with the pace of completion, thus favoring their re-emergence,
- Inadequate enforcement provisions for contraventions...

According to a report published by (UN-Habitat 2010), countries such as Egypt and Morocco have “*almost halved the total number of slum dwellers in urban areas*.” The Cities Without Slums program initiated in Morocco in 2004 is interesting in that this urban development strategy has enabled slum dwellers to occupy decent housing with access to water, energy and sanitation facilities.

By 2011, some 100,000 new homes had already been created in different regions of the country. Overall, 37 of Morocco’s 83 cities have been transformed, a change that has benefited over 1.5 million people (World Bank 2013). Other operational perspectives are emerging such as:

- The implementation of a Geographic Information System for the management and monitoring of the “Cities without Slums” program,

- The establishment of a partnership agreement with the Royal Center for Remote Sensing,
- Evaluation of changes (extension and/or demolition).

The Favela Bairro Program in Brazil: A Strategy for Formalization and Infrastructural Improvement

Until the 1970s, favelas in Brazil were considered “temporary”. As their communities grew in density, the pressure on the public authorities increased and the demands for the installation of infrastructures were affirmed.

From the 1980s onwards, the idea of improving these informal settlements “on the spot” and not eradicating or evicting them began to emerge. As example, the work of John Turner was supported by the world bank. He suggest a solution to slums ; improve the environment rather than demolish them: If governments could improve the sanitary conditions and environmental quality of slums, people, with their organizational abilities and resourcefulness, would eventually upgrade their homes, especially if security of tenure and access to financing were provided. (Werlin, 1999). Slum upgrading programs signaled a significant shift in government policy toward slums and informal settlements. (Arimah & Branch, 2011), *“First, slum upgrading has shifted from an intervention solely on housing to one that focuses essentially of access to infrastructure and services. Second, the scale and scope of earlier upgrading programs have changed; earlier multi-sectoral projects with ambitious social and economic objectives have been replaced with more modest projects which tend to have fewer objectives sectors and settlements. Third, the mechanism for achieving secure tenure has witnessed a shift from more formal titling components to alternative innovative informal forms of tenure, which include group tenure or communal titles, usufruct and adverse possession”*. Upgrades to slums are also less expensive than alternative options. Over a 30-year time, an examination of slum rehabilitation efforts in Africa reveals some fundamental developments (Gulyani & Bassett, 2007)

In effect, a new urban planning instrument appeared, the result of the struggles of social movements for the improvement of living conditions and land regularization: the Zones of Special Social Interest (ZEIS or AEIS) (Doiseau, 2013).

In 1995, with the support of the IDB, the Municipal Secretariat of Housing (SMH) of Rio de Janeiro launched the Favela-Bairro program: a strategy of formalization and tertiarization through the rehabilitation of favelas that were not, until then, the object of real recognition in Brazil. The challenge was to integrate them into the fabric of the city itself.

That said, municipal officials delegated program implementation to multidisciplinary teams and their role was one of coordination.

Among the circumstances of its emergence:

- A considerable increase of a parallel power of gangs and a strong insecurity and violence.
- The lack of coherence and coordination between the operations of the municipality that preceded it, as well as the absence of a budget for the operations.
- The discussions of the Executive Group on Popular Settlements during the elaboration of the Master Plan in 1992 gave rise to a consensus of several principles that subsequently established this Favela Bairro program: urbanization and formalization as the main policy vis-à-vis the favelas with a transversal work.

Despite immense challenges, the program has been a remarkable success. *“It is one of the most ambitious and forward-looking neighborhood modernization programs that any city has ever launched for unplanned communities, not only in Latin America but in the world”* (Bate, 2002), says Janice E. Perlman, president of the Mega-Cities Project, a multi-country network of experts who address urban issues.

The municipal government and the IDB have allocated more than \$600 million to this program, most of which will be spent on public works in 120 of the city’s 600 favelas. This involves restructuring to integrate mobility in the city, upgrading and installing essential services such as drinking water, sewage, rainwater drainage, garbage collection and public lighting...

Favela Bairro took place in two phases:

- The first, from 1994 to 1999, involved restructuring, which allowed the opening up and raising the standard of living of the favela inhabitants through specific projects in each of them.
- The second phase, from 2000 to 2004, went beyond purely structural improvements and focused on the provision of

various social services, including major sports, education and health facilities, as well as a land titling program.

These measures have increased the presence of the authorities through social means and have allowed needy residents to reduce their dependence on drug traffickers for assistance.

Among its objectives:

- Include the marginalized population, having no choice but to occupy urban land, outside the law.
- Regulate the entire urban land market, and reduce differences in quality and price between tenure models.
- Involve the inhabitants in the process of modernization, urbanization and consolidation of the favelas through direct participation mechanisms.
- Improve tax collection and diversify land supply for low-income groups.

This being said, it goes without saying that, like any other intervention, the Favela Bairro has certain shortcomings that arose during its progressive development, namely

- Difficulties and problems related to the assignment of informally leased buildings,
- The maintenance of favelados by tolerance in place slows down the regularization and granting of formal titles,
- Tolerance suits tenants who no longer fear that rents will increase because of the increased value of the buildings resulting from the existence of formal titles,
- The small owners and traders escaped the obligation to pay taxes, which reduced the income of local communities and prevented heavy operations from taking place,
- The municipality has not addressed the issue of legal regularization of the favelas,
- The development of the social structure of the favelas generates the intra-urban migration of the impoverished middle class and thus the expansion of the slums,
- The slowing down of the land regularization process is detrimental to the issues of environmental protection and the natural massifs of Rio.

CONCLUSION

Between Rehabilitation and Institutionalization of Informal Cities

The Cities Without Slums program and the Favela Bairro are proven experiences that could be applied to different contexts today. Their key to success is the adoption of inclusive strategies. The socio-spatial restructuring plans adopted in both examples show, at first glance, that the joint efforts of the State, specialized public bodies and local authorities are an absolute necessity, in terms of concertation and coordination of their objectives.

However, the extent of the phenomenon supposes in these states as well as in Algeria, the integration of foreign operators, acting through their experiences acquired through the world and in harmony with the context of these countries.

After reading these best practice cases, we feel it is essential to remember that the slum phenomenon is specific to each context and does not call for generalizable solutions. However, and in view of the considerable variations in the different strategies adopted, particularly that of rehabilitation, restructuring and formalization, the strategic approach to our slums, in this case the Bardo slum in Constantine, must take account of the multiple realities specific to this area.

The internal social aspects, the economic reality, the management of public spaces as well as the participation of the inhabitants in all the interventions, which constitute the toolbox of an effective strategy of integration of the slum and the informal city in general in the urban policy of the whole city.

Taking charge and equitable management of land, protection of the most vulnerable social groups, injection of equipment and infrastructure of urban services, support a real strategy of improvement and urban rehabilitation, combining several operations and coordination such as resettlement, restructuring, titling of properties, etc.

Figure 4 provides a detailed summary of the strategies and operations carried out to improve informal cities, based on the analysis of best practice cases.

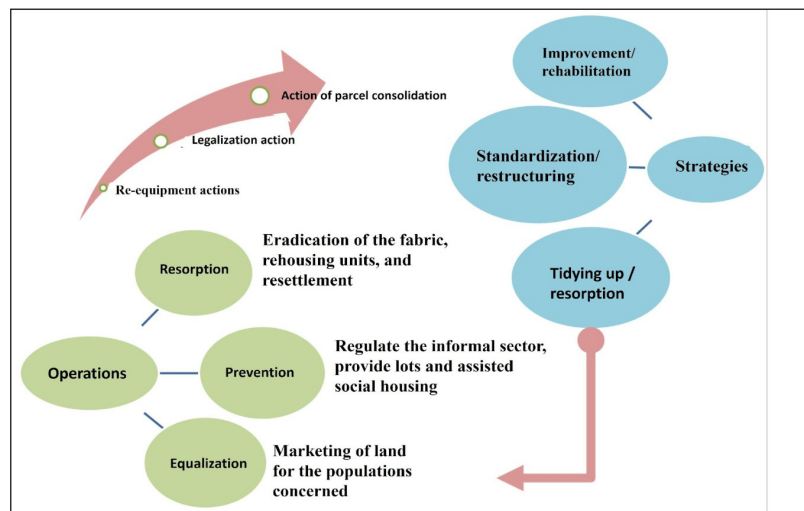


Figure 4. Summary of best practice case analysis and recommendations for improving informal settlements (Authors)

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