

**Community Participation in Housing and Urban Development
in Poor Urban Communities,
Case Study of Umbadda, Khartoum**

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Abstract

Community participation represents a voluntary action carried out by community members who participate with each other in different kinds of work to achieve desired goals. Participation includes people's involvement in decision-making, in implementing programs, sharing in the benefits of development programs and their involvement in efforts to evaluate such programs. (Cohen and Uphoff, 1977). The United Nations defined community participation in 1955 as being synonymous with community development, which is viewed as a process which creates conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation (Chambers, 1980).

According to Muhammad, community participation, known locally as *nafeer or fazaa*, is a deeply rooted ancient phenomenon in the Sudanese culture and has been common especially among traditional people in rural areas and villages, where it is usually men's domain (Muhammad, 1975). In rural areas people are accustomed to plan and build their houses and neighborhoods in conformity with their tradition, culture and their living environment, and it is affected by religious beliefs, ethnic and cultural backgrounds as well as laws, political environment and economic situation. While in urban areas peoples' participation depends on different factors such as cultural backgrounds, economic situation, social relations, history and age of the neighborhood.

In southern Sudan for instance, which is inhabited mainly by animist African tribes, people participate in building their huts. First women prepare the circular wooden frame, with the help of their family, friends, and neighbors, but when it comes to the upper conical part, it is usually prepared on the ground by the men of the family, then friends and neighbors collaborate to lift it on top of the wooden frame, that has been prepared earlier by women, later women gather to do the finishing touches of the hut. – e.g. plastering it with mud and cow dung.

In the northwest, which it is mostly inhabited by Arab nomadic tribes, tents form their buildings, and since their economy depends on livestock herding, wool is used as the main building material, and it is prepared and woven all year long by women, then fixed by men, after that women decorate the tents with handicraft items they make.

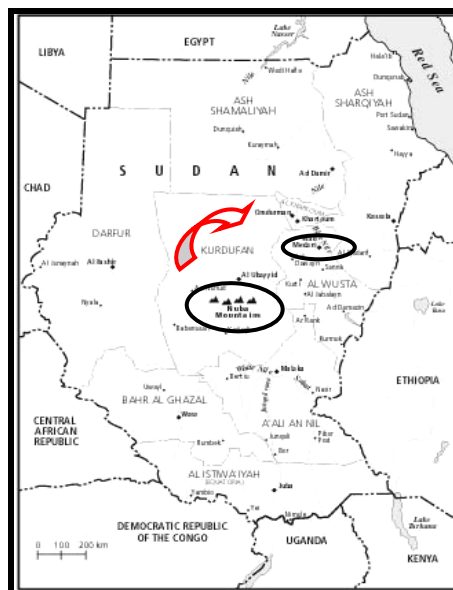
The present paper discuss community participation in Umbadda, a newly planned poor neighborhood in Greater Khartoum the capital of Sudan, which has a population of 5.5 million inhabitants growing at an annual rate of 5.6% per year. Data collection was based on a filed research carried out by the author in the summer of 2002 through intensive interviews with community leaders, and a structured household questionnaire.

1 Introduction

According to a study carried out in 1988, most of Umbadda residents were from western Sudan, and especially from the Nuba Mountains (Shaddad, 1988) this findings was confirmed by the questionnaire I carried out in the summer of 2002: 92% of the population were Nuba who migrated from the Nuba Mountains region (Map No 1), and only 8% were from other regions of Sudan who came to live in the area after its replanning.

Umbadda residents are mostly internally displaced households who have migrated to Greater Khartoum from different parts of the country, at different times; some moved during the Mahdia's regime (1885-1898) lived in some parts of the city for several decades. Others moved later because of drought and famines during the 1960s and after the mid-1980s, lived in squatter settlements within the city, and the rest of them moved directly to Umbadda which was then a rapidly growing informal settlement.

As a family member or tribal group moved to the place, and found it convenient, they would encourage other family and tribe members to move to that place. This created tribal residential zones formed along tribal relationships, with narrow winding streets, and streets that separate the different zones from each other, with a big open space outside these settlement used for the *kambala*¹ dance. After replanning one could see that it has clear plots, wide roads, vacant plots reserved for services, and open spaces. The place reflects a great deal of poverty, which spreads its wings all over the neighborhood, but much clearer in the houses where a number of them are without boundary walls, others have low walls built with mud bricks, most houses have one or two rooms, and a *rakoba*².



Map 1: Map of Sudan Showing the Nuba's Place of Origin and Their New Settlements in Umbadda.

2. Objectives

The primary objective of this paper is to assess the dynamics of community participation in Sudan in terms of its components, activities, resources mobilized, mobilization processes, modes of

¹ / *Kambala* dance: *Kambala* dance is usually performed at night outside the village, sometimes at a central point between two or more adjacent villages to allow participation of as many youth as possible (this could be daily, weekly, fortnightly, monthly, etc depending on the season of the year) (Muhammad and Osman, 1984).

²/ A light shaded area used as a verandah

implementation, actors involved, and those who are excluded, as well as the socio-political context in which community participation takes place, bearing in mind that all these factors work together. Aiming to answer the question that forces itself: can residents fend for themselves in home construction, and depend on their own collective action in the provision of basic services i.e. build schools, health centers and infrastructures? And what are the best means that could facilitate people's participation in developing their human settlements. Pointing out that community participation is a long time development process that creates positive as well as negative changes in people's lives, environment and attitudes.

3. Criteria for Selection of the Case Study

My selection of Umbadda was based on a number of reasons: 1) Difference in residents' social structure and cultural background where residents have come to live together from different places. 2) The difference in the phases through which these neighborhoods were created: because settlement of Umbadda resulted from mass movements. 3) Residents were known before replanning

4 . Social Situation

Most of the households are single family households, some of them had lost their male head husband, father, etc. which disrupted the social situation of most of these families, who have already lost their livestock due to different disasters. Women in Umbadda are rather aggressive; they perform triple roles similar to those assumed by rural women: a) a productive role as income generators, b) a reproductive role, that included bearing, looking after and educating children, c) a community management role (Moser, 1988).

5. Community Participation in the Area

Resident's life in Umbadda had passed through different experiences before and after replanning of their neighborhood whether in their social life, neighborhood layout, dwelling design, and participation among community member that could be divided into two types (Figure No 1):

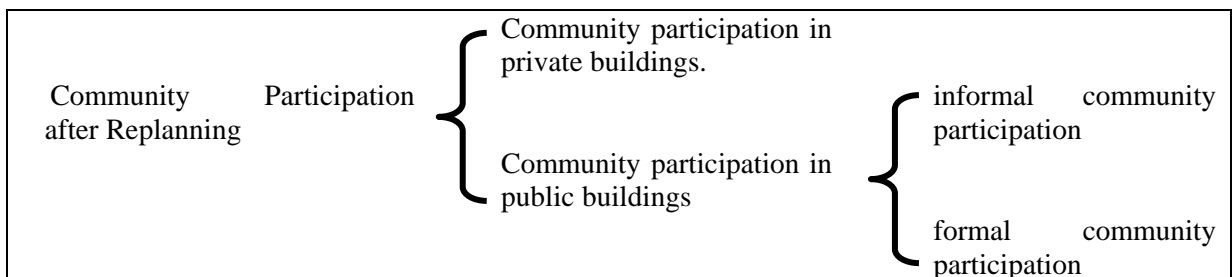


Figure 1: Classification of Community Participation in Umbadda.

For the purpose of this paper I will only discuss community participation in private buildings after replanning.

5.1. Community Participation after Replanning

According to a number of interviewees, peoples' social life started to change after replanning for a number of reasons:

- a. Conflicts arose between residents throughout the replanning period especially when deciding on different people's eligibility to land ownership.
- b. The appearance of a number of people from outside the area who used to live in the city but have built a boundary wall around vacant unplanned plots, waiting for replanning to take place

to come and live in the area. This made some of the residents feel uneasy about that, since they think those people did not share with them their hard times, but got the fruits.

- c. Conflicts between popular committee members and some residents on issues that surfaced during replanning.
- d. Negligence of people's social and cultural background by planners.

All these factors negatively affected residents' social fabric and made community participation among them hard to achieve, except between people from the same tribal groups and between family members who didn't have as many conflicts between them.

5.1.2. Community Participation in Private Buildings after Replanning

Participation in private buildings (i.e. houses) is affected by people's social relations, economic status, skills and traditions especially among the Nuba. As I was told by a number of interviewees, most of the work, especially preparation of bricks, is done by the owner of the house and his/her close family members, mainly his nephew because, he is the one responsible for taking his uncle's revenge (*tar*) in case he was killed by somebody, so he is the one who should help in this process. After that walls and roof will be built by the help of other family and tribal group members in response for assistance call from the owner.

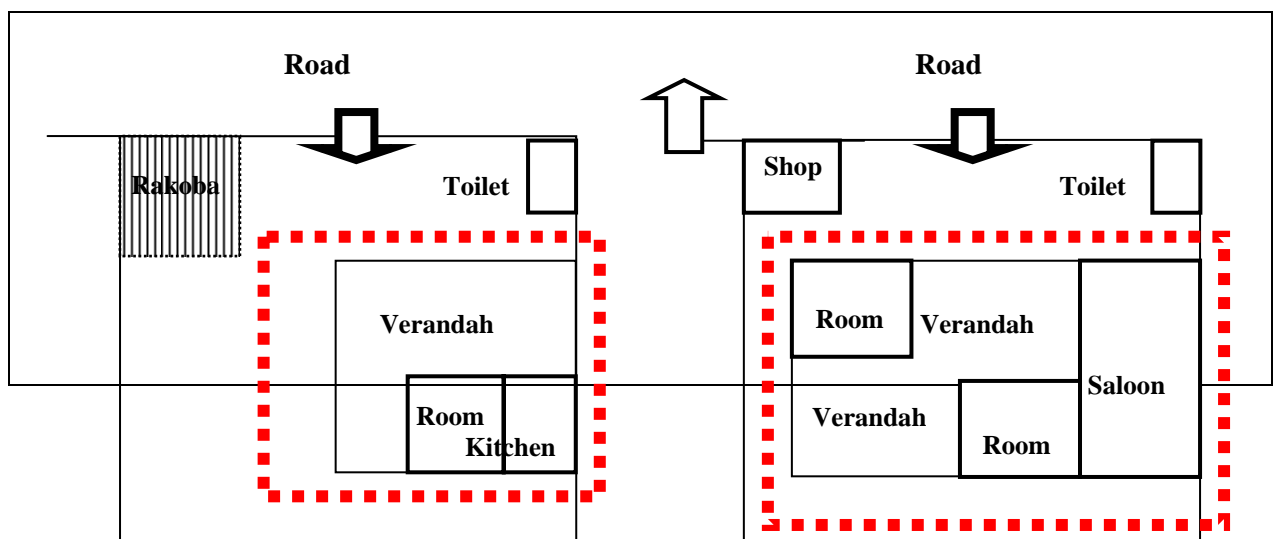
After replanning, and without residents' participation, the Ministry of Engineering Affairs provided residents with a model design for their new houses that consisted of two alternating rooms and two verandahs. The design proposed two different building materials and construction techniques, which were:

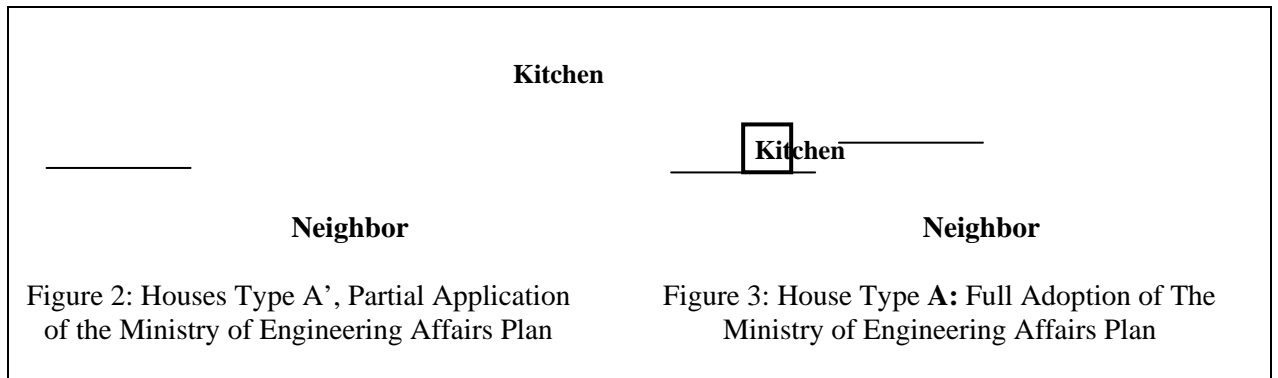
- i. Red brick walls with corrugated iron sheets roof.
- ii. *Gishra* wall (i.e. composed of an external wall of baked bricks and an internal one of unbaked bricks tied to it) with traditional roof.

The model design is common in northern and central Sudan and some call it "the railway design" because apparently it was first adopted by the Sudan Railways Company. Although it suits the climate in the area, it doesn't fit their way of life, culture, skills and knowledge, previous house design, and economic situation; which resulted in the presence of different dwelling designs after replanning, which could be described as follows:

Type A: houses that adapted the proposed Ministry of Engineering Affairs plans partially (Figure No 2) or fully (Figure No 3) in these houses:

- a. Minimum participation was used during construction because of the introduction of construction techniques and building materials with which many residents were not familiar.
- b. Rooms are properly oriented; doors and windows open to the north-south direction allowing for good ventilation.
- c. Most of the residents who adapted these plans are from those who lived in the city for some time before moving to Umbadda or have good financial resources.





Type B: houses that didn't adapt the proposed plan, which were built through self-help efforts among family members or tribal groups:

- a. Rooms are scattered within the plot (Figure No 4), some of them were not properly orientated and others are windowless but this was clarified by some interviewees who described their huts in their homeland as being windowless.
- b. Most of the residents who didn't have a clear plan are those who moved directly to Umbadda from their homelands, and have limited resources.

The proposed plan by the Ministry of Engineering Affairs, in spite of its good orientation and adoption of good construction technique, delayed private dwelling construction because:

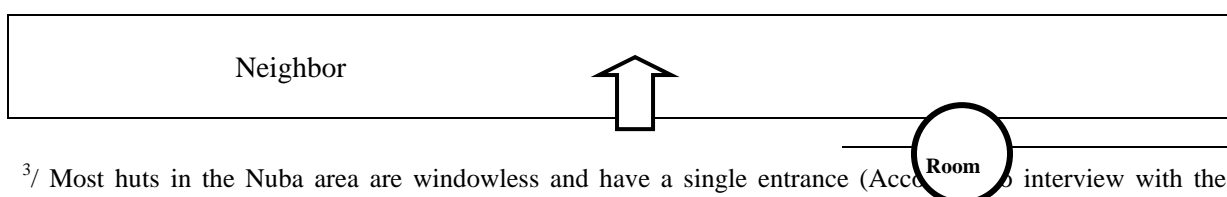
- a. Its construction techniques are new to residents' therefore residents couldn't use self-help to construct it and costly hired labor is needed.
- b. Resident's financial ability couldn't satisfy the design requirements.
- c. The proposed dwelling design doesn't satisfy their cultural needs.

Those who followed the Ministry of Engineering's plan started by building a room and a verandah, with walls built using red bricks or red brick from the outside and mud bricks from the inside, known locally as *Gishra* walls. While those who did not adopt the proposed plan typically started by building a room or two at one end of the plot using adobe, i.e. clay soil stabilized in some case with straw. In many cases the soil was obtained from the road in front of their houses causing great damage to the unpaved street. A number of observations can be made about houses in Umbadda:

- a. Rooms were oriented in different directions, using minimum doors and windows³.
- b. To avoid surface floods in the area destroying their houses again, people chose the highest point within their plots to build their rooms.
- c. Walls are not straight and do not have a unified height because they use simple construction techniques and primitive instruments.

Studying the houses in this area, and going back to the typical traditional houses of the Nuba people, I conclude that residents were confused by the Ministry's plan that introduced building materials and construction techniques that were unknown to them. This has resulted in:

- a. No clear house design in most of the houses especially among those who moved directly to the area.
- b. Lack of confidence within residents to use their previous building knowledge.
- c. Self-help in private buildings as well as public building is limited in the area because of the introduction of new building materials and techniques.



^{3/} Most huts in the Nuba area are windowless and have a single entrance (According to interview with the popular committee representative at the local council, confirmed by the head of the council Mr. Mahgoub).

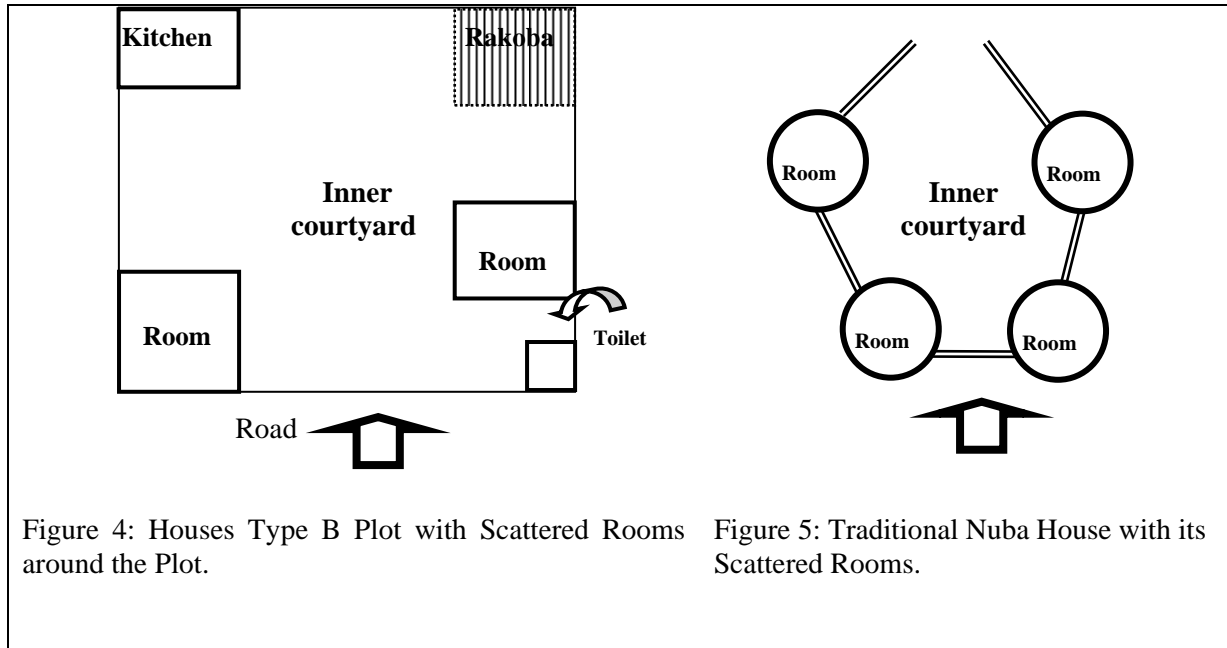


Figure 4: Houses Type B Plot with Scattered Rooms around the Plot.

Figure 5: Traditional Nuba House with its Scattered Rooms.

6. Obstacles to Community Participation

A number of constraints to community participation have been encountered in this community at its different levels. These could be listed as follows:

Weak social relations: The community in this part of Umbadda seems to be homogeneous, being from the same origin which is western Sudan; but interviews revealed that there are great conflicts between them caused by a number of reasons, e.g. conflicts during replanning, in addition to differences related to their sub-tribal groups. These factors together helped in the *discretion* of social capital that could help community members to participate fully in development efforts, and has direct effects on the development of individual houses and their neighborhood.

Limited resources: Lack of experience, skills, and knowledge; weak social relations, in addition to residents' lack of time because their main priorities are to feed their families not to attend meetings or to participate in community development projects. Furthermore, lack of water connections within their homes or at walking distances from it made people spend substantial time and resources to provide water for their families.

Cultural obstacles; Nuba's⁴ culture which restricts participation among family members to the nephews only, and exclude women from contributing to participatory work, leaving out an important helping hand from contributing to development efforts.

7. Concluding Remarks

Community participation in building individual houses was limited by providing residents with a standard layout of the Ministry of Engineering that doesn't satisfy their cultural backgrounds, as well as their economic abilities or building knowledge. This layout was totally different from their

^{4/} The Nuba mountains comprise about 99 hills. Tribal groups that live on and around a hill are identified by it. This created many inter-tribal differences between them.

previous dwelling designs⁵, which have been described by Mahgoub as “striking because more skill, care and indeed art go into their making than with any other Sudanese tribe”. (Sudan Notes and Records, 1987). Therefore if these skills and knowledge have been developed and used, more participation in development efforts could have been attained by residents themselves, and a more interesting built environment would have resulted. Cultural and personal changes are not easily quantifiable but have important implications especially on their dwelling layouts. Therefore a plan that suite their social way of life should be made available at the locality office for them to utilize.

For any community participatory work to take place there must be some form of resources, whether financial, materials, knowledge or human resources but in this area there is lake of: Wide-spread poverty could be viewed as an overarching constraint to the success of community participation in the area

8. Recommendations to Improve Community Participation in the Area

A number of recommendations are proposed in order to develop this part of the city:

1. Local authorities should help in reducing tensions between community members themselves, and between them and their popular committee, which was created during replanning by encouraging communal meetings and organizing various activities that bring people together in an amicable atmosphere (e.g. festivals and various national and religious celebrations). This will improve people’s social capital, which will allow community members to participate willingly in communal projects.
2. Develop an active network of neighborhood organizations, train them on different issues and skills that will increase their access to resources, and direct their resources and energies to developing their neighborhood.
3. Develop human resources, i.e. knowledge and use of new and improved building techniques by facilitating formal training on those techniques and methods.
4. Women must have access to education, training and finance, to enable them to become economically productive, and be prepared to play significant roles in the development of their neighborhood

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⁵ / **Nuba, Dalang (Kordofan,):** The typical traditional house of the Nuba people living in the northern parts of the hills, such as areas in and around Dalang, is of the central courtyard type. A hedge is used as a boundary wall and connects the ring of huts surrounding the courtyard. Entry to compound is through an arched gate, and the arch is made out of freshly cut tree branches. The fireplace is located in the middle of the courtyard and a shed may be constructed nearby.

Nuba, Kadugli: the typical house of the Nuba tribes inhabiting the areas around Kadugli in the southern parts of the Nuba hills has a central courtyard surrounded by a 1.5m high boundary wall constructed of stone without mortar (Mahgoub). In both areas the lower part of the huts built in the houses in Kadugli area has a circular plan and the upper roof part is conical in shape. The wall of the hut is constructed of mud and is built on a stonewall footing.

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