



Experiences of urban relocation and life in condominiums in Addis Ababa

Key Findings

- Condominiums enabled poor and middle-income households to become house owners.
- The move to condominiums resulted in improvements in housing, water and sanitation.
- Adolescents faced problems moving during the school year: commuting was costly and time consuming and so most moved to schools in the new areas the following year.
- Adolescents considered schools and health facilities to be of lower quality in the new condominiums; families who could afford to do so preferred to use private clinics.
- Markets and shops were initially less well developed in the new areas, and young people complained of limited recreation options.
- Pollution and safety were greater concerns in the old neighbourhoods, and condominiums were seen as safer and cleaner.
- Overall, adolescents felt the move was positive and most adapted quickly, though social ties were weaker in the new condominiums.
- Adolescents in the condominiums appear to have more agency in decision-making and better internet access.
- Gender differences in decision-making, leisure activities and spending were significant: adolescent girls had less freedom, but mobile phones and social media made a difference.

Urban relocation: a growing issue in Africa and Ethiopia

Urban relocation has been on the rise worldwide and was predicted to become 'larger in Africa than population displacements in any other single sector' (Cernea 2005). The interest in redeveloping city centres for business investment and the need for housing for the urban poor led to the clearance of large areas in central Addis Ababa and resettlement of their residents on the outskirts of the city. This has impacted property and assets, livelihoods, access to services and social networks (DuRoyaume 2015). The relocation has led to the disruption of businesses, especially since many poorer households relied on informal work from their homes and at markets. Relocation away from these areas represented a locational disadvantage, with transport problems and costs and higher costs of living (Kloosterboer 2019). To cope, household members pooled their financial resources, used remittances, pensions or loans to supplement their incomes, while compromising on other expenses, such as food or healthcare (Charitonidou 2021). Relocation also affected access to education, health services, and shops and markets, which were initially less developed in the suburbs. In social terms, several studies pointed out the risks of family separation and divorce, with potentially serious mental health consequences for those affected (Abduselam and Belay 2018). Moreover, the disruption of social networks, notably funeral, credit and socio-religious associations and the difficulties in re-establishing social ties have been highlighted (Weldemariam 2017). However, less is known about the effects on children and youth and their adaptations (Pankhurst and Tiumelissan 2014).

Condominium housing for the poor

While housing programmes are often left mainly to market forces and the private sector, in Ethiopia the state-led Integrated Housing Development Programme involved the construction of large condominium complexes mainly on the city outskirts (UN-HABITAT 2017). This enabled poor and middle-income households to become homeowners for the first time, something they had previously thought of as unimaginable and referred to as 'a dream come true' (Pankhurst et al., forthcoming). However, despite government subsidies and pro-poor intentions, poorer households were often unable to afford the costs of relocation, given the requirement for a 20 per cent down payment and monthly mortgage payments for up to 20 years (Abduselam and Belay 2018). Studies point to improved housing and sanitation, though some negative effects on livelihoods, transport and services are mentioned (Planel and Bridonneau 2017). However, few studies discuss the effects on children, except for those that highlighted the lower levels of pollution and more space as positives and the greater risk of small children falling from staircases as a negative (Tiumelissan and Pankhurst 2013).

The study

This mixed-methods longitudinal study was carried out in three communities in Addis Ababa, two in the centre and one in the outskirts, that are part of the Young Lives Ethiopia study sites located in poor areas of the capital. A total of 215 young people aged 19 to 20 were re-interviewed in 2020 eight years after the first interviews in 2012. Of these, 27 per cent had been relocated, approximately half in condominiums. This enabled comparisons between those who were relocated and those who remained in the old neighbourhoods, and between the views of those who were relocated before and after the move. In addition to the survey, in-depth interviews were carried out with 59 of the adolescents, 14 of whom lived in families that had moved to condominiums (all except one).

Housing entitlement for poor and middle-income households

Condominium housing has enabled poor and middle-income households to transition to home ownership. However, richer households sought to build their own houses, some moving first to a condominium, and the poorest households were unable to afford the down payment and monthly mortgage payments. Some of the latter had to sell their apartments, downsize or move to cheaper accommodation to cover mortgage costs. Those moving to condominiums also had to cover the costs of finishing the interior of the apartments, and spent much more on household improvements than those who were not relocated, as Rahel recalled:

“My father is a tailor and a guard; we paid a 70,000 birr down payment; since our family has more than five members we were allocated a two-bedroom flat in the Ayat area. But the monthly payment of 3,300 birr was too expensive, so we sold the flat and bought a one-bedroom one in Bole Arabsa where the monthly payment is only 1,100 birr.”

Water, sanitation and electricity improvements

Moving to condominiums resulted in improvements in water and sanitation, with access to running water and flush toilets in apartments in contrast to shared taps and pit latrines in compounds often with smelly and unhealthy conditions. Previously liquid waste was disposed of in ditches and sewage overflowed in the rainy season, as noted by Fasil:

“We use a communal public toilet and people do not clean it regularly and it has a bad smell which disturbs the family, and it is unpleasant to use. There are eight households and about 30 people using it. The septic tank is pumped out every eight months. There is no place for washing hands after latrine use and a basket for tissues. There is no light inside and it is difficult to use at night.”

Those who moved to condominiums also experienced fewer water shortages, though in certain areas and for some households living on the upper floors serious shortages still occurred. The move to condominiums also resulted in better access to electricity with private rather than shared meters, used by almost all for cooking. However, electricity cuts and increasing costs were serious concerns.

Access to education and health services

Relocation affected the access to and quality of services in different ways. The impact on education was the greatest since the move happened during the school year. Relocated students could not join local schools, and the time and cost of commuting to their old schools was challenging so some stayed with relatives or friends in the old neighbourhood. Most teenagers felt that the quality of education and facilities was better in the old neighbourhood, as Sara described:

““ I was attending eighth grade and continued travelling there daily since the ICT facilities are good and the teachers much better. I had to leave at 6:30 in the morning and it took me an hour and 30 minutes each way and cost 15 birr. I was often late, so sometimes I stayed with a cousin who lives not too far from my old community. The teachers were understanding since they knew the situation. Despite this I still managed to obtain good results and joined ninth grade. ””

Moreover, missing school for work and dropping out was more common among those who were relocated. Adolescents seemed less concerned about health facilities, though some suggested that health care was not as good in the new areas, and government health centres had limited equipment and medication. Many expressed a preference for private services but not all were able to afford to pay for it, as Dereje noted:

““ The health centre in the area we moved to does not have laboratory facilities so the medical personnel can only prescribe medicine on the basis of patients' symptoms not test results. This means that many families prefer to go to private clinics that give better services. ””

Markets and shops

In some of the new condominium areas there was less choice and goods were more expensive, so some residents travelled to cheaper markets in the city centre. However, over time markets and shops developed in the condominium areas, and some teenagers noted with satisfaction that there were also supermarkets.

Leisure and recreation

The adolescents felt that there were fewer recreation options in the condominium areas, and many travelled into town for leisure activities, as Sara explained:

““ There is nowhere to go in the neighbourhood and it is boring. It was easy to go out in Menderin and I had many friends. I miss our former neighbourhood, and knew lots of people, and it was nice going out for errands or to buy things. Now I spend most of my time at home. It is not that I am not allowed to go out, it is that there is nothing to be gained. ””

They also reported a lack of libraries and sports facilities, and were reluctant to join youth associations, some saying these were politicised. Many teenagers spent more time at home watching films, playing video games and on social media, though some worried about fake news and the politicisation of social media.

Security and policing

Safety was seen as a greater problem in the old neighbourhoods, and respondents cited the risks of theft, drunken behaviour, addiction and street fighting, with inadequate police control (although community policing represented a limited improvement), as described by Leikun:

““ Our community is becoming more and more unsafe. There are people who chew Khat [a narcotic plant] and drink alcohol. They are taking mobile phones and other things from people. There are drunk people who disturb the community and are also many fights between gangs. Though there is community policing in the area, they are not bringing any change. ””

While the situation was seen as becoming worse in the old neighbourhoods, in the condominiums there were improvements. Initially a lack of street lights was a problem, though some respondents, particularly girls, were still worried about walking at night and near forest areas since thieves were known to snatch mobile phones and other belongings.

Expectations and experiences

Comparing the expectations of the adolescents prior to the relocation with their subsequent experiences, a large majority felt the change was mainly positive, especially those who had moved to condominiums. The problems they faced during the move, including costs and accommodation, were more of a challenge than expected.

Challenges of adapting to the new environment

Adapting to the new environment was also more difficult than expected, though social issues, including relations with neighbours and friends, were seen as less of a worry. This suggests that three years after the move, those relocated adapted fairly well. Rahel recalled early difficulties and later adaptation.

““ At first I cried a lot as I felt lonely and disoriented. I dislike the new area, and stayed home a lot except to go to church. Initially I had only one friend, although we began to get to know our neighbours and my family joined a burial and a religious association, and I began to make friends. ””

Fewer adolescents reported access to services – including water, education and health, as well employment opportunities and places for children to play – as a matter of concern after the move. However, the availability and cost of transport was seen as a greater problem.

Regarding the physical environment, the respondents expressed a dislike of smelly, dirty streets and crowded conditions in the old neighbourhoods, and worried about their safety from theft, street fighting and drunken behaviour. Rubbish in the street and air pollution were seen as the most important environmental problems, and more so in the old neighbourhoods. In contrast, in the new condominium areas they expressed more worries about whether it was safe to bring up children there. Education, policing, cafés and bars were seen as more important matters in the condominium areas, whereas health care, markets, shops and access to work were more important in the old neighbourhoods.

The qualitative evidence suggested that adolescents were more concerned about leisure activities, though safety was a major worry in the old neighbourhoods, especially regarding substance abuse, fights and drunken behaviour.

Social relations

Social relations, especially those with friends, family and neighbours were seen as important, but funeral, religious and credit associations and services much less so. In terms of services education, markets and shops were viewed as more important than health and access to work. Social support was seen as more important in the old neighbourhoods, as Membere suggested:

““ I like the social life especially the way we celebrate during holy days eating together with our neighbours despite differences in language and religion. Muslims come for Christian holidays and vice versa. We help each other if someone faces difficulties, in sadness and in happiness. ””

The teenagers characterised the old neighbourhood as noisy and violent but also vibrant and friendly, whereas the new condominiums were seen as quiet, affording greater respect for privacy but limited social interactions.

Gender, relocation and agency

In terms of gender differences, boys tended to value friends, family, funeral and credit associations, safety and health more, and girls tended to value neighbours and religious associations, especially among those relocated. Boys were more concerned about shops, and girls about markets; education was more of a concern among relocated girls and non-relocated boys, perhaps since school drop-out among boys was higher among those who had been relocated. Cafés and bars were seen as more important by relocated girls and non-relocated boys. Girls were more concerned about dirty and crowded streets. Relocated boys were more worried about theft, street fighting, drunken behaviour and noise pollution, and non-relocated girls worried about safety and air and water pollution. Girls in the condominiums were anxious about safety at night.

Regarding gender and agency, though most teenagers were still at school, boys were more likely to miss school and drop out, and were also more likely to want to migrate abroad, especially among those who were not relocated. Concerning decision-making, boys were more likely to make decisions on their own and disagree with older people, and to discuss matters with siblings and friends, whereas girls were more likely to discuss matters with parents.

The major gender differences in activities related to leisure, with boys more involved in sports, clubs and video games, and girls in visiting friends and going to religious institutions. While boys spent more money on games, food and clothes, girls spent more on school equipment, transport and make-up.

The qualitative evidence suggests that girls had less freedom, since parents imposed more limits on how they used their time and were more concerned with whom they were friends. Mobile phones and the internet gave adolescents some freedom over how they spent their leisure time, and those in the condominiums had better internet access. However, since they lived at home and most depended on parents for pocket money their ability to make major decisions was limited. Tsehay recalled:

““ My mother controls most of what I do, and she advises me not to spend too much time in the evening on the Telegram app, fearing I will be late to school in the morning, and my sight will be affected. But in fact once I am at home she cannot control how I use my mobile. ””

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings of the research we suggest the following recommendations:

- Consider housing subsidies and alternative options for the poorest, given the difficulties very poor households have in paying for the costs of condominiums.
- Plan relocation to take place during school holidays as far as possible, to prevent the disruption to schooling that occurs when it happens during the school year.
- Improve services in the new condominium areas beyond housing provision. This includes better health and education provision, and more leisure and recreation options.
- Pay greater attention to issues of environmental pollution and safety, including gender-based violence. This is particularly important in the old neighbourhoods.
- Promote changes in societal gender attitudes that give girls more agency and decision-making in leisure activities and spending in the home, in schools and through media and community initiatives.

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