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SUSTAINABLE HOUSING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
*Opposite Sides Of The Same Coin*

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SYNOPSIS

It is common for governance structure to be highly compartmentalized, with public housing and community development totally segregated. Consequently, a public housing estate is just a group of buildings to provide basic housing for low-income people. Apart from being a shelter, it does not do anything else for the tenant residents. In fact, because of the lack of housing management and maintenance, living conditions become more and more difficult for the residents. As their environment deteriorates, their social, economic and environmental wellbeing is seriously affected. The whole community suffers physical hazards, crime, nuisance, health risks or social risks, such as drugs. Public housing estates become generators of persistent poverty.

In the new millennium, a number of developed countries are beginning to make public housing sustainable by combining it with community development; this interaction benefits the community. By combining the two systems through Systemic Asset Management, both public housing and community development become sustainable. Residents are empowered to seek employment, education and training and this leads to greater socioeconomic participation. As the community in the public housing estate strives to improve their quality of life, this lifts their confidence in public housing and they begin to see the benefit of gaining security of tenure in public rental housing.

Sustainable housing and community development are complementary sides of the same coin. This paper discusses how to take advantage of this manifest fact and finally shows how sustainable public housing with sustainable community development is developed through Systemic Asset Management.

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 When public housing estates sustainable, they become an essential part of basic infrastructure “ASSETS” that support the wellbeing of low-income people living in a human settlement. Whether these sustainable public housing estates are in a neighbourhood, a town, a city, or even in a remote rural area, they house a sustainable community established by the inhabitants living in a particular form of human settlement.
- 1.2 Housing, therefore, is a system; so is a human settlement that incorporates housing and other infrastructure systems to support the communities that form a society. Like all living systems in this Planet Earth, humans must live and work in a community in order to collectively establish social values and discharge responsibilities for the wellbeing of a society. Community is also a system; only it is perceptibly less tangible—because a community is made up of humans who are highly reactive to economic, social and environmental externalities—unlike public housing estates, which are, at best, material assets—and therefore more complex.
- 1.3 Housing, if it is to be sustainable, is never developed for its own sake but to provide a reliable and affordable service to the people seeking housing. Whether it is private or public housing, it leads to the evolution of a community.
- 1.4 Housing and community are inter-related and inter-dependent. The success of sustainable public housing management together with sustainable community development that leads to the wellbeing of the residents in this settlement is the direct result of the correlation between the two. Increasingly, researchers, scholars and policy-makers are incorporating this correlation into a holistic planning, development and management of the two sectors combined. Establishing such a holistic settlement must be based on a comprehensive set of criteria identified for achieving the economic, social and environmental goals. This is the Systemic Asset Management process at its best, especially in the development of public housing that enhances the community’s quality of life.
- 1.5 Over the last two decades people in UK have been increasingly realising that they are not living ‘within their means’. In order to carry out sustainable housing development, the UK Government accepted a set of five principles as the basis for achieving the goals of housing sustainability:

- “Living within environmental limits;
- Ensuring a strong, healthy and just society;
- Achieving a sustainable economy;
- Using sound science responsibly; and
- Promoting good governance.”

(Justine Cooper and Keith Jones, 2008)

- 1.6 Unfortunately, most government agencies around the world, including many in the UK, continue to treat housing and community development as separate entities within the narrow confines of object thinking. This fragmentary approach has made public housing — even in the form of community housing or social housing — unsustainable; much to the detriment of the community in that housing estate, especially the poor.
- 1.7 This brief paper is prepared to help providers, administrators and policy-makers to establish sustainable public housing & community development essential for the enhancement of the people’s quality of life, through the principles and practice of Systemic Asset Management. After all, sustainable housing and sustainable community development in this modern world are fundamentally “*the opposite sides of the same coin*”.

## 2. Current Public Housing & the 3-E Sustainability

2.1 The “3-E” Sustainability under Systemic Asset Management stands for Economic Prosperity, Social Equity and Environmental Integrity. The current conventional approach to housing pays very little attention to the attainment of these three bottom-line aspects of sustainability. The basic problem is the attitude of providing housing for the sake of housing, without defining the housing service’s objectives; hence pertinent criteria are not identified or set to guide the public housing programme. Public housing can be programmed to impact the tenants’ opportunity for employment, learning and re-training, involvement in economic and social participation, including the establishment of a safe living environment, with optimal control over physical hazards, crime, nuisance, health risks or social risks, such as drugs. It is up to policy-makers in the government to exploit this.

### 2.2 The Impact of Public Housing on the Well-Being of Households

#### 2.2.1 Affordability of Public Housing

- (1) Housing is a most decisive factor in determining whether or not a household is poor.
- (2) The cost of housing is often the single largest expense for most households; and generally if this exceeds 30% of a household income, this family will not be able to meet other household needs – such as children’s education, adequate food supply, clothing, mobility, and others.
- (3) In Australia, with easier access to home ownership under its social housing programme, policy-makers are able to help low-income households to trade off after-housing income in the early years for greatly reduced housing cost in later years.
- (4) This form of retirement saving provides income security for the household without depending on children’s disposable income when they grow up. Conversely, housing security and affordability in later years also enables income transfer from parents to children when household costs are highest for them to support their young families

(National Community Housing Forum (NCHF) Seminar:  
[www.nCHF.org.au/downloads/housing\\_sustain\\_comm.pdf](http://www.nCHF.org.au/downloads/housing_sustain_comm.pdf))

- (5) In the same NCHF paper it is reported that low-income people in either social home ownership or social rental housing in the public housing sector have ‘*life tenure*’ which is strongly associated with a positive quality of life. However, people in private rental are deprived of security of tenure hence they are least feeling secure and find it hard to enhance their ‘*quality of life*’.
- (6) In developed countries, such as Australia, private rental costs are too high. Even with the help of Government Rent Assistance, many low-income households live in poverty. Although in Australia the government has a social housing programme to protect these low-income tenants through the provision of affordable rents, it has no control over rent increase. Consequently, with every dollar earned by any member of the household, 25-30% of it is taken in increased rent. Under this poverty trap, many low-income residents are not able to remain in the workforce.

### **2.2.2 The Quality of Public Housing**

- (1) Inadequate physical condition in housing is also a major factor that determines whether a household is poor.
- (2) Poor layout planning in a public housing estate often results in physical hazards, crime, nuisance, health risks or social risks, such as drugs.
- (3) Due to inadequate research and planning in public housing programmes, there are insufficient common areas in public housing estates for community interaction and strengthening of social ties, and also for childcare, simple skills training, garbage holding rooms—let alone for refuse sorting for recycling, etc.
- (4) Poorly designed buildings in public housing fail to meet the needs of low-income households. The condition of public housing in Tanzania as reported by Felician Komu (2008) reveals that the floor space is too small to accommodate the average size of a family – consequently they don’t have sufficient living space for a family of 7 (mother and father, 3 children, grandfather and grandmother), sharing a small toilet with a water tank for bathing and washing of clothes; insufficient storage space, insufficient areas to do school home work, and no privacy for the teenage children—not just the adults. Due to lack of space, the parents can’t produce handicrafts to earn extra income. Such inhuman conditions are also found in many public housing estates in Asia.

(Felician Komu, 2008,  
*Quality Housing and its influence on House Consumers’ Behaviour*,  
COBRA 2008)

- (5) Poor maintenance of buildings and common area causes physical hazards, fire risks, water damage from deterioration of building components and plumbing, and fire risk from poor electrical wiring system design and installation without adequate checking and maintenance.
- (6) Building maintenance is usually carried out by out-sourced contractors, who have very little incentive to provide professional service. This has a psychological impact on the community who tend to litter and irresponsibly cause damage to the buildings and facilities.
- (7) Such inadequate housing conditions limit school children's ability to study. As a result their future employment prospects are poor. The same is also true with adults seeking retraining or acquiring further education to improve their employment opportunities; the poor living conditions limit their ability to learn.

### **2.2.3 Potential contribution of Public Housing to positive employment outcomes**

- (1) If public housing is treated as essential public assets for the wellbeing of low-income households, this kind of proper social housing will enable the residents to acquire skills for social participation in both paid and unpaid civic work.
- (2) Through political will, policy-makers can ensure public housing, including social and community housing, are properly planned, developed and managed; such a home environment will improve school retention for the young residents.
- (3) The Australian National Community Housing Forum (NCHF) found that three housing related factors affect school retention:
  - A. Frequent relocation,
  - B. Overcrowding (limiting the ability to study), and
  - C. Lack of after-housing income for meals and school activities.
- (4) The NCHF also finds that proper social housing contributes to employment outcomes:
  - A. It may provide security of housing tenure – policy-makers in the government should take advantage of this in social housing.
  - B. Some forms of social housing, such as community housing, put an emphasis on tenant participation.

- C. The skills picked up from social participation programs often open up employment opportunities for residents entering the program for the first time; and for those who have gone through the process before, it will open pathways to further training to improve skills, which means better employment outcomes.
  
- (5) Some models of community managed housing—such as affordable housing and co-operative housing—provide socioeconomic programs involving housing organisation with close links between tenants and a variety of attachments to the labour market.  
(National Community Housing Forum (NCHF) Seminar:  
[www.nCHF.org.au/downloads/housing\\_sustain\\_comm.pdf](http://www.nCHF.org.au/downloads/housing_sustain_comm.pdf))

## **2.3 Sustainable Community Development In Public Housing Estates**

### **2.3.1 Changing the stigma of public housing estates as amongst the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods**

- (1) Due to poor quality living conditions accentuated by over crowding, lack of neighbourhood and building management and maintenance and seemingly total deprivation of community development, public housing estates are contemptuously scorned by the population as being only slightly better than the squatter settlements. Even in developed countries the public housing estates are often taken to manifest themselves in:
  - A. Low educational achievement,
  - B. Low employment opportunities,
  - C. Social stigma,
  - D. Family breakdown,
  - E. Drug use and crime,
  - F. Serious health problems, and
  - G. Lack of access to transport and other essential services.
  
- (2) Through the process of Systemic Asset Management (SAM) for Public Housing, a public housing estate can be upgraded to work in tandem with Sustainable Community Development so as to empower the tenant residents to change the social stigma.

- (3) Most importantly, under SAM, “social mix” by allocation of medium-income to low-income tenants including Rent Assistance (RA) renters is targeted in the housing policy. The objective is to avoid over concentration of low-income and AR renters including single-parent renters that would make them a disadvantaged community.

### **2.3.2 Support for low-income tenant residents so they have access to socioeconomic participation**

- (1) If residents in public housing have childcare and other family support services, such as health care, skills training, further education, they too can have job opportunities open to them.
- (2) This is where policy-makers, public housing providers and community development agencies need to work together to establish sustainable community regeneration in line with a sustainable public housing programme. As discussed earlier, they are interrelated and interdependent so must be holistically planned, developed, operate and maintained systemically.
- (3) **So what is “Sustainable Public Housing”?**

Sustainable public housing means the development of a living environment that supports and enables the residents to have opportunities for socioeconomic participation. Thus sustainable housing and sustainable community development must work together.

- (4) **What about “Sustainable Community”?**

**A. NCHF defines it as follows:**

A “Sustainable Community is one in which the relationships and supports exist to allow its members to sustain economic and social participation.”

**B. NCHF explains further that:**

“In today’s Australia, this also means the ability for this to occur within a diverse community and not simply one tightly linked around extended family, clan or employment relations.

- (a) Where you live (location),
- (b) The standard of housing,
- (c) The affordability of housing, and
- (d) Most importantly, the sustainability of housing arrangements is a fundamental condition for all of these.

- C. The ability for communities to take responsibility for meeting community needs and challenges may be the most important aspect of a sustainable community. This is a key to the growing concern with community renewal as a response to social exclusion.”

(National Community Housing Forum (NCHF) Seminar:  
[www.nchf.org.au/downloads/housing\\_sustain\\_comm.pdf](http://www.nchf.org.au/downloads/housing_sustain_comm.pdf))

- (5) In the final analysis, **Sustainable Housing and Community Development are Opposite Sides of the Same Coin.**

- (6) **So how and where should a housing estate begin?**

**A. Strengthening Community**

- (a) In the case of existing public housing estates, the government at different levels and cross-sector agencies should establish a Strong Community Strategy to strengthen a community in such a neighbourhood.
- (b) Under a combined housing and community development programme, an existing public housing estate is modified so that it can create conditions whereby the resident community is able to respond to meet social, economic and environmental needs.
- (c) Under such circumstances, existing public housing estates are restructured to incorporate:
- Building the skills-base so that residents can take up socioeconomic participation.
  - Fostering community leadership.
  - Establishing self-management capacity and capability.
  - Strategizing social programmes to overcome public annoyance, vandalism, crime, public safety or rent/service charge arrears as well as family dysfunction.
  - Creating dynamic community-business-government partnerships
  - Improving the transport infrastructure to gain access to employment and services.
  - Ensuring that socioeconomic participation positively impact neighbourhood wellbeing.

- Developing control, trust and good financial management to attain social pride and security

(d) For new public housing to become sustainable, the above setting up is intrinsic to its systemic asset management programme, including planning, development, operation and maintenance, leading to the enhancement of the community's quality of life.

**B. Community Jobs Programme within a Sustainable Public Housing Estate**

(a) Under a Sustainable Housing Programme socioeconomic participation begins in its own housing estate.

(b) Once the tenant residents have received effective capacity building in skills development, the public housing management employs them to take care of the housing estate in management and maintenance. The paid jobs within the public housing estate should include the following:

- Housing estate administrative office staff,
- Cleaning and non-specialist maintenance work of common areas,
- External compound maintenance, care of plantings, and grass cutting
- Security contractor to employ residents with training and provide 24-hour security service in 3 shifts,
- Refuse contractor to employ residents to carry out refuse sorting for recycling before disposal by their garbage truck crews,
- Painting contractor to employ residents with training to execute making good wall and floor defects, surface preparation and painting work (scaffolding erection must be done by specialist workers of the contractor),
- Vegetable farming plots with training for residents to grow produce—for own household needs and to sell surplus to the cooperative shops in the housing estate.
- Other paid work and non-paid work activities promoted or approved by the housing management

**C. The ability of Public Housing Estate Management to identify Work in the Job Network and its Capacity Building Programme to enable Residents for Employment**

(a) Providing jobs for public housing residents in the employment market needs appropriate capacity building to help them. With community development support, a public housing estate can achieve that. In Australia, NCHF includes the following in their social housing programme:

- Work orientation,
- Information about jobs available in their Job Network,
- Residents are trained in how to apply for jobs,
- The Housing Estate Management with a good record of Sustainable Community Development can provide informal and formal references to support residents' job applications.

(National Community Housing Forum (NCHF) Seminar:  
[www.nCHF.org.au/downloads/housing\\_sustain\\_comm.pdf](http://www.nCHF.org.au/downloads/housing_sustain_comm.pdf))

(b) As all the above are part of the sustainable public housing policy, they have a major bearing on the job application outcomes.

(c) If there is a “social mix” in the structure of a Sustainable Public Housing Community, its housing organisation will have a greater capacity to establish close links between the tenant residents, with a variety of connections to the labour market.

(d) In Australia, the role of public housing managers is often expanded to include the role of social housing managers. They are increasingly recognised as the effective lead agents in such community development activities, to lift the social status of otherwise disadvantaged communities.

- (e) Often social housing managers are in a “strong position to broker partnerships between tenants and other agencies:
- Health,
  - Community services, or
  - Police.
- (f) One striking example is the rejuvenation of Proctor Way, Argyle Community Housing, Claymore, NSW. For 27 years, the tenants in this community endured a constant barrage of negative publicity. Today, with tenants working closely with the Community Housing Manager, this housing estate has not only provided safe and secure tenancy, but has lifted the area to a clean and desired housing level. Now it has a long waiting list of new tenant applicants.
- (Proctor Way, Argyle Community Housing,  
Building Sustainable Communities,  
Office of Argyle Community Housing, 1998)

### **3 Developing Sustainable Housing Assets with Sustainable Community Development through Systemic Asset Management**

#### **3.1 Sustainable Housing and Sustainable Community Development are both Systems Assets**

3.1.1 Public housing *per se* is just the development of public buildings to house low-income people. It does not realistically concern itself about the wellbeing of the residents. Neither does it do anything towards developing a sustainable community.

3.1.2 Since housing does not go beyond quantitative concerns to provide maximum housing, and also housing quality is confined to “low-cost”, it does not contribute to service delivery of any social, economic and environmental benefits whatsoever for the tenants—not even security of tenure, safety, health. Under the circumstances, public housing for the sake of building provision alone cannot be termed an infrastructure asset.

3.1.3 Housing without community development has no sustainability either. Sustainable housing therefore must go hand-in-hand with sustainable community development. The two systems are interrelated and interdependent. Consequently, sustainable housing combined with sustainable community development becomes a complex system of systems.

#### **3.2 Systems Assets need Systemic Asset Management**

3.2.1 As systems assets, both sustaining housing and sustainable community development need Systemic Asset Management (SAM) for planning, development, operation, maintenance and renewal or disposal.

3.2.2 When the two systems are working together to gain maximal social, economic and environmental sustainability in service delivery, we need the two SAM systems to work in tandem in order to satisfy two sets of multi-systems criteria. Only with such a SAM process will we be able to harness all the working benefits from cross-disciplined and cross-sectorial efforts of performance monitoring, data analyses and decision-making to continually optimise the process of enhancing the community’s quality of life.

### **3.3 The conventional approach to achieving Sustainability of Social Housing**

3.3.1 The conventional approach to achieving Sustainability of Social Housing is to focus efforts on building maintenance of the existing stock.

3.3.2 Even in UK, much of the results of public housing research and analysis from the Stock Condition Survey (SCS) rely on public housing estate maintenance managers and the Decent Home Standard (DHS) to achieve sustainability of social housing.

(Justine Cooper and Keith Jones, 2008)

3.3.3 Community development is more or less ignored as it is beyond the work-scope and expertise of the maintenance managers; under them the so-called sustainability of social housing, if ever achieved, is rather superficial.

3.3.4 Earlier, we saw the example of rejuvenation of Proctor Way, Argyle Community Housing, Claymore, NSW. It is an excellent example of sustainable housing combining with tenant residents empowerment through sustainable community development.

3.3.5 In 2002 the Victorian State Government in Australia launched a state-wide programme of Neighbourhood Renewal to transform communities that might have missed out on the state's growing prosperity. In 2004 when the Hon. State Housing Minister Candy Broad became the President of EAROPH, she gave a status report on the Neighbourhood Renewal's progress in her Keynote Address at the EAROPH 19<sup>th</sup> World Planning and Housing Congress, 21 September 2004:

- (1) "More than 1,000 community jobs have been created.
- (2) "More than 2,500 houses have been upgraded.
- (3) "Acceptance rates for public housing are up in 90 per cent of locations that have Neighbourhood Renewal projects.
- (4) "Crimes against people are down in 90 per cent of Neighbourhood Renewal areas.
- (5) "Community perceptions about their neighbourhoods are tracking upwards."

3.3.6 That was less than 2 years after the NR programme had been launched. By end of 2008, the programme has a lot of impressive success stories that anyone can see on their website.

3.3.7 What makes the NR programme so successful is the combination of physical renewal of neighbourhood with empowerment of local people through community development activities.

### **3.4 Systemic Asset Management (SAM) for Sustainable Housing combined with Sustainable Community Development**

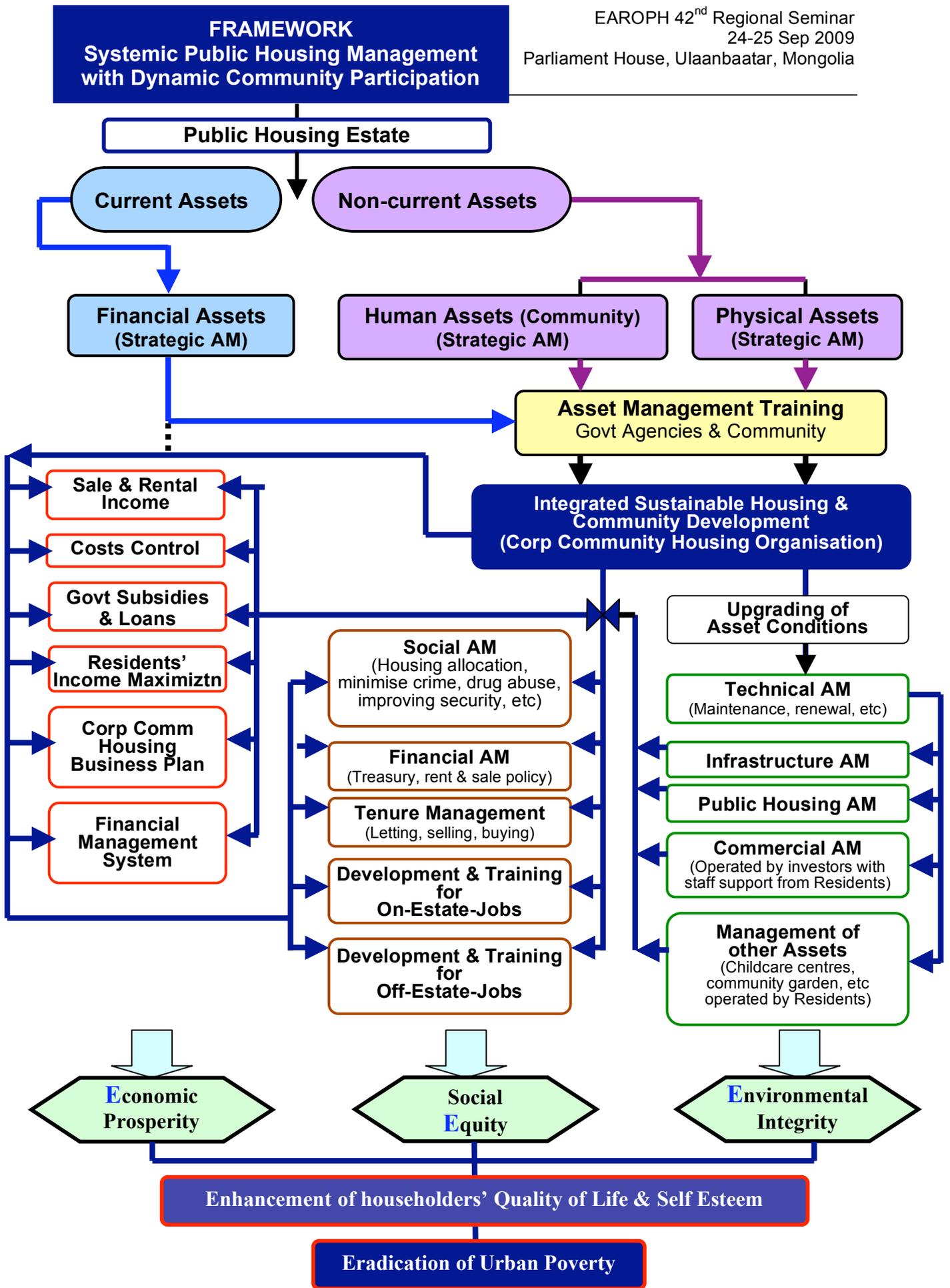
- 3.4.1 By combining housing and community development as a dynamic system, housing now has a service outcome of enhancing community life. Conversely, community development as a dynamic system will also have a service outcome of enhancing the socioeconomic and environmental quality of housing.
- 3.4.2 Combining the two through SAM has a service outcome of establishing a sustainable human settlement for the ultimate enhancement of the people's quality of life.
- 3.4.3 Under the SAM programme, government officers will be trained in Sustainable Public Housing Assets' Planning, Development, Operation and Renewal with Service Delivery leading up to Sustainable Community Development.
- 3.4.4 Under another SAM programme, tenant residents from the related Public Housing Estate will be trained in Sustainable Community Development as an essential asset for enhancing the 3-E Sustainability of this Housing Estate.
- 3.4.5 Trainees will learn to understand the principles and practice of SAM. They will learn the process of setting up a SAM Plan for Sustainable Housing and another SAM Plan for Sustainable Community Development to complement Sustainable Housing.
- 3.4.6 The trainees will have to learn all the modules in order to reach goals of optimal service delivery from the assets.
- 3.4.7 For example, the public housing agency will be trained to set up and implement community surveys, data analysis and use of the analytical results in improving the housing standards. The tenant residents will be trained to enable them to become involved in key aspects of the survey, such as understanding the survey process, obtaining data, assisting in data analysis and participate in decision-making.

3.4.8 Both groups will learn:

- (1) How to increase tenant residents' pride and participation in the community in their public housing estate.
- (2) How to enhance housing standards and the physical environment through participation.
- (3) How to become involved in training, continuing education, leading to increasing employment opportunities.
- (4) How to improve personal safety in the housing estate and reducing crime.
- (5) The promotion of health and wellbeing of the community.
- (6) How to improve access to services in the housing estate through improving government responsiveness under a public-private-partnership (PPP) program.

3.4.9 Both groups will also learn the importance of :

- (1) Engaging tenant residents in managing and maintaining the wellbeing of this public housing estate under a paid work programme.
- (2) Involving tenant residents in learning opportunities and how the impact of work and learning will improve individual and community health and socioeconomic wellbeing.
- (3) Enabling residents to convert welfare to work through government's cross-sectorial support programs on local employment connected to education and training.
- (4) Setting up employment and learning coordinating program.



## Conclusion

- 4.1 Public housing by itself is just building for the sake of building, and it cannot be considered an asset. In fact, more often than not, neglecting public housing estate can turn it into a serious public liability.
- 4.2 Only when public housing is combined with community development will it become a public asset.
- 4.3 Both housing and community development are complex systems, hence we need Systemic Asset Management to ensure the combined systems will become sustainable, thus enhancing the people's quality of life.
- 4.4 This is only an introductory paper. We need a lot more work to show the full SAM programme for capacity building in achieving Sustainable Public Housing with Sustainable Community Development. They are indeed the opposite sides of the same coin.

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