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## TAKING RESIDENTIAL RESPONSIBILITY



Nor Rima Muhamad Ariff

Government action to provide Malaysia's urban low-income households with subsidised apartments may create the slums of tomorrow, believes Nor Rima Muhamad Ariff, a PhD student in the School of Architecture and Building. That's if these new residents aren't educated and engaged about the rights and responsibilities of shared housing.



National economic development in Malaysia is leading to rural migration to urban areas. Much of this population growth comes from people seeking job opportunities in the cities, often with limited financial resources. The lack of decent and affordable housing forces them to live as squatters in illegally-built, shanty towns. To tidy up the shanty towns, Malaysian authorities relocate the squatter households to subsidised flats in multi-storey apartment blocks.

For the urban poor, this move has mixed blessings – they now have legal responsibilities to contribute to the building owners' organisation (the management corporation, similar to an Australian body corporate) and fund the upkeep of the building's common areas.

The problem is that few of these new residents participate in or contribute funds to these organisations. Disputes between the residents, the management corporation and the building's elected management agent are rife, resulting in poor management and maintenance of these low-cost, multi-storey dwellings.

"These new residents understand the value in looking after something that is theirs but see no benefit in contributing to the upkeep of the common areas and amenities. Some owners will pay the maintenance charge but will not participate in the committee. Others even refuse to pay the maintenance charge. Frequently they ignore their responsibilities," says Rima.

"If these attitudes and behaviours are allowed to persist then in coming decades these same buildings that were the part of the solution to illegal shanty towns will in turn become the slums of the future," she says.

Rima believes that we need a better understanding of the causes of disputes and mismanagement. She will survey the perception and satisfaction levels of all of the stakeholders with the current management and maintenance practices.

Rima intends to present her findings to Malaysian government authorities with the hope that they may form the basis of an education and engagement program that will increase the communities' knowledge and awareness of their residential rights and responsibilities.

### FURTHER INFORMATION:

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