

ANALYSIS OF ISSUES IN GOVERNMENT HOUSING PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examined government housing programmes and measures for housing the poor and reasons for their ineffectiveness. It was a survey research study. The area of the study was Aba Urban of Abia State of Nigeria. Questionnaire was used for data collection. Population of the study was made up of all professionally registered housing practitioners in Aba Urban of Abia State of Nigeria. Statistical mean was used for data analysis. Recommendations were based on the findings.

Introduction

As a mark of some medium of responsibility and responsiveness to the demands by the citizenry, government has embarked on housing policies or measures aimed at alleviating the sufferings of the poor (Anele, 1999). In an earlier study, Ekpenyong (1992) had adumbrated these policies and the reasons for their ineffectiveness as follows:

- a. Site and Service Schemes or Programme:** - What government does here is to provide sites and such infrastructural services as water, electricity, road networks, schools and health services. The plots are allocated to people who are “willing” and able to develop them. Government also provides housing loans to enable people develop. However, allottees are required to repay the loans for development within a specific time, say 20 years.
- b. Squatter Upgrading:** - Here the government provides squatter settlements with amenities such as roads, water and electricity, rather than bulldoze them. Occasionally, grants are provided with which buildings may be improved. Again, plots are realigned or rearranged. In doing this, some houses are demolished in order to reduce the density of the settlements.
- c. Joint Finance by Government and Prospective Allotees:** - This is exemplified by the case of Federal Housing Programme by the then Abacha regime in Nigeria. Public servants who desired their own housing were made to pay part of the initial cost of the building before actual construction started. Government was to augment by financing part of the project and seeing to its completion. Thereafter, the prospective owners would pay up the balance.
- d. Legal Control of Rents:** - Government tries to control rents charged by landlords. The idea is to make housing affordable by the poor. But this strategy rather exacerbates the housing problem by creating artificial scarcity of housing. Owners of housing refuse and resist imposed rents by government. Therefore, they refuse renting their housing and at the same time, use several intrigues to exploit the tenants. They collude and extort more money from helpless tenants under the guise of security deposits, agreement free etc. Others willing to invest in building are discouraged by rent control via law.

- e. **Encouragement of Individuals and Corporate Bodies to Build Houses for Rents:** - Government encourages private individuals and corporate entities through various ways, to build for purposes of renting.
- f. **Building and Allocation of Low Cost Houses:** - Government at both Federal and State levels build low cost houses which are allocated to workers, whose rents are deducted as sources.

In spite of the above measures by government, the housing problems of the urban poor had persisted (Anele, 1999).

Writing on Sustainable Built Environment, Agwu (1995) maintained that two thirds of the total populations in developing countries live in human urban settlements. Between 1950 and 1980, the city dwellers had increased from 300 million to 1.8 billion. The towns and cities in developing countries now take in some 45 million people a year compared to 7 million in the developed countries (UNDP, 1992). At this rate, about 2 billion people would populate the urban centres by the year 2000. Cities and towns provide shelter, health, education, employment and social services not only to their own residents but also to many, more, people who cannot find adequate facilities in the small towns elsewhere. The increasing number of people has implication on the facilities and services (Agwu, stressed).

The issue of built environment is complicated by weather conditions, which always affect the building materials (the quality of materials). The determination of the materials (environment) in and around growing cities has serious consequences on the health and comfort of the urban poor who can not help themselves. For most urban poor in developing countries, the living conditions are worsening as a result of wastes generated and the incapability of local and state governments to render services including water, transport, electricity, sanitation, and energy for cooking. The rich can always move out of the deteriorated parts of the inner city areas but the poor is trapped within (Agwu, 1995).

The U.N World Housing Survey reported that between 1960 and 1970, Nigeria required 2, 238, 000 housing units and from 1970 to 1980 it required, 5, 591, 000 units. In view of the apparent housing shortage the Federal Government Proposed to build 202, 000 housing units between 1975 and 1980 but only 12.1% of this planned number was realized.

This number did not include the private sector contribution to housing production. Starting from 1980 to the present, the various governments expressed the desire to provide housing to the urban poor. But in spite the efforts of the public and private sectors there have not been marked improvement in the housing shortage in most towns. Housing shortages in Nigeria reflect the escalating housing rents varying from N10, 000.00 per flat, per month, in some cities to about N15, 000.00 per flat, per month in others.

As part of the explanation to this paradox, Agwu tends to agree with Okpala who said, in actual fact, only a relatively planned housing programme by the government is actually realized during the target period stipulated in the plans and programme (Okpala, 1983, cited in Agwu, 1995). Discussing the caring for buildings, Agwu (1995) opined that better planning depends on using reasonable standards. According to Agwu, standards include such things as Building Regulations, the use of Classes Order the Control of Advertisement Regulations, the written scheme, and a host of local byelaws that relate to development. There are also, Central Government Administrative Standards which emerge as a result of commissions, reports and committees that advise, recommend, and guide planning authorities in the implementation of their policy (Agwu, opined)

Writing on shelter (urban blight), Markus and Morris (1980) had this to say, ... the public and professional outcry against the (monotony) in humanity and vast scale of much new planning and

housing is causing a reaction against megalithic, large-scale solutions and a research for variety complexity and smaller-scale forms.

Also discovered is that, there is a persistent demand for greater involvement of the public in environmental decisions at national, regional and local scales, some political acceptance and corresponding machinery exist, but the movement is in its infancy. In reviewing vernacular and primitive settlements, Marcus and Morris suggested some essential qualities in the following words:

They are shelters of societies whose social pattern have specific forms to accord with their material, spiritual and kinesthetic needs, resolved through available resources and conditioned by factors of economy, environment, climate and site. They are shelters built from within the community as essential to its life and as a direct expression of it and not to the plans and specifications of appointed specialists.

In spite of the above measures, the housing problem of the poor has persisted. The question then arises, “why are government housing programmes or measures for housing the poor ineffective?” The reasons according to Anele (1999), include:

1. Squatters hardly participate in decision-making.
2. Part of the original population of squatters is displaced.
3. Differential benefits pose a problem: - The reason is that, through dedensification which involves demolition of some houses for the purpose of roads construction, many people lose their plots or houses.
4. Poverty is an unfortunate phenomenon: - The poor who have no money are at the same time expected to jointly develop plots and provide services which government provides alone for rich people in some societies.
5. Loss of contact with neighbours: - Living in an unplanned environment is so natural and analogous to village setting and promotes communal living. Squatters enjoy such communal life in squatters’ settlement unlike layouts in which individualism reigns.
6. Problem of insecurity: - Because people have no access to information on the ongoing projects in their neighbourhood, they feel unsecured. Hitherto, people bought and sold houses freely but the involvement of government makes it difficult for people to conjecture where roads would be constructed.
7. The control of rents by government brings about shortage of supply of housing. The reason is because builders and landlords are discouraged by fixed rents.
8. Legislation of land tenure has its own attendant problem. In the process of legalizing people’s tenure over land, some squatter settlements are unconsciously incorporated into urban land market. Consequently, land prices are increased, and sometimes, some squatters are displaced (Ekpeyong, 1992; Anele, 1999; Iroegbu & Wogu, 2006)

Method

The population of the study was made up of all professionally registered housing practitioners in Aba urban of Abia state of Nigeria. They numbered 20 (NIESV, 1995). The entire population was studied, and as such, there was no sampling.

Questionnaire was the instrument for data collection. It was developed based on the literature review and the research question. It was made up of 10 structured questionnaire items. Each structured questionnaire had a 4-point scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree representing 4,3,2, and 1 point(s) respectively. Two experts in the faculty of environmental studies,

Abia State University – Uturu, subjected the instruments to face validation. It was reviewed based on their comments.

Twenty copies questionnaire were distributed by hand, completed and returned. Statistical mean was used to analyze the structured questionnaire items. A mean of 2.50 and above was taken as (agree) an indication to why government housing programmes or measures for housing the poor are ineffective, while items with mean less than 2.50 were regarded as (disagree) an indication of effective housing programme or measure by the government.

Findings

The following findings were made:

Research question: Why are government housing programmes or measures for housing the poor ineffective?

Table 1:

Respondents Means Responses on Why Government Housing Programmes or Measures for Housing the Poor are Ineffective in Nigeria

S/N	Items	X	Remarks
1	The poor hardly participate in making decisions that impinge on them.	3.60	Agree
2	Parts of the original population of squatter settlements are displaced-thus causing more problems	3.01	Agree
3	A differential benefit poses a serious problem	3.43	Agree
4	Squatters are poor	3.82	Agree
5	Loss of contact with neighbours due to introduction of planned and patterned layout and or building	3.23	Agree
6	Problem of insecurity	2.57	Agree
7	The control of rents by government brings bout shortage of supply of housing	3.74	Agree
8	Legislation of land has its own attendant problem	2.71	Agree
9	Housing shortages in Nigeria reflect the escalating housing rents varying from N10,000.00 per flat, per month, in some cities to about N15,000.00 per flat, per month in others	3.50	Agree
10	Reasonable standards such as building regulations, the use of classes order, the control of advertisement regulation, written schemes and a host of other local byelaws that relate to development are not always used for better planning and caring for buildings	2.74	Agree

Grand mean = 3.24

Table 1 above shows that all the ten items obtained mean scores of above 2.50. Therefore, the 10 items suggest the reasons why government housing programmes or measures for housing the poor are ineffective in Nigeria.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that the 10 items identified, suggest reasons for ineffective government housing programmes or measures for housing the poor. The findings include: - squatters or the poor hardly participate in decision making that impinges on them - others decide for them. Part of the original population of squatter settlements is displaced thus, causing more problems; differential benefits pose a serious problem. Those living near the roads benefit more. The reason is that, through dedensification which involves demolition of some houses for the purpose of roads construction, many people lose their plots of housing; poverty of squatters; loss of contact with neighbours due to introduction of planned and patterned layout and or building; problem of insecurity; the control of rents by government; legislation of land tenure, housing shortages and reasonable standards not utilized. These findings are in accordance with the findings of Ekpanyong, (1992); Agwu, (1995); Anele, (1999); Iroegbu and Wogu (2006).

Recommendations

The possible solutions to the afore-stated among others include: -

1. The poor squatters should be allowed to participate in decision making that impinge on them-others should not decide for them.
2. No part of the original population of the poor squatters should be displaced.
3. Differential benefits should be redressed to accommodate those not living near the roads.
4. Government should not wait for the poor to develop plots. They (government) should help out.
5. Since squatters enjoy communal life, living in an unplanned environment should be better for them, than the planned layout.
6. The problem of insecurity should be looked into, so that people will be having information on the ongoing projects.
7. The issue of fixed rate by government on rentage should be avoided if we actually need an increase in supply of houses.
8. Land tenure should be dis-legalised otherwise; most squatters will continue to be displaced.
9. Housing shortage should be looked into for a possible solution.
10. Reasonable standards should be used always for better planning of buildings.

Conclusion

None participation of poor squatters in decision making, displacement of part of the original population of squatters, differential benefits, poverty of squatters, loss of contact with neighbours due to introduction of planned and patterned layout, insecurity problem, control of rents by government and legislation of land tenure, housing shortages and reasonable standard not utilized are among the reasons why government housing programmes or measures for housing the poor are ineffective.

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