

Achieving Sustainable Housing Development in Nigeria: A Critical Challenge to Governance

Adesoji David JIBOYE

Department Of Architecture

Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria.

E-Mail: adconsul@ yahoo.com. G.S.M: +2348032323637

Abstract

A critical challenge to effective governance in Nigerian is how to make housing adequate and sustainable. It has been observed that the phenomenal rise in population, spontaneous increase in size of most Nigerian cities have hitherto led to acute shortage of decent and affordable dwellings. These have resulted to diverse urban problems ranging from overcrowding, deplorable environment and living conditions, inadequate infrastructure, homelessness, and several others. Ensuring adequate and sustainable housing delivery towards progressive urbanization in our cities thus constitutes a critical challenge to governance. In examining this developmental challenge, this article underscores the need for good governance through the application of appropriate development strategies that could enhance optimum utilization of existing resources for effective housing delivery. It highlights the need to stimulate a policy that will facilitate infrastructural development alongside housing delivery. The paper advocates for renewed collaboration and commitment among stakeholders in housing and urban development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Sustainable development, housing, urbanization, governance, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

A major developmental challenge facing the developing world now is how to cope with the urbanization that is currently on the increase and minimize its adverse consequences on the environment and living standards. Since the end of the World War II, urbanization in developing countries has increased significantly, with an increasing proportion of the population in most countries now concentrating in large urban agglomerations. In most cities of the developing countries, investment in infrastructure including housing has failed to keep pace with the growth in population (Ajala, 2005). Nigerian cities also share this similar experience as available data reveal that their population has been growing at an alarming rate, thus ranking them among the fastest growing in the world, (Oladunjoye, 2005; World Bank, 2008; Jiboye, 2009; Oduwaye, 2009). A UN Report on Nigeria indicates that the annual urban population growth rate is 5.8 percent, while the national population growth rate is 2.8 percent. This urbanization rate has resulted in a total urban population of 62.66 million or 43 percent of the total population (UN, 2007).

Thus, this phenomenal rise in population, spontaneous increase in the number and size of most Nigerian cities have in the past few decades led to acute shortage of decent and affordable dwelling units. The outcomes of this developmental process are diverse urban problems ranging from overcrowding, deplorable environment, poor living conditions, inadequate and poor infrastructural services, homelessness and other related problems (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004; Olotuah and Ajenifujah, 2009; Jiboye, 2009). Since housing constitutes a significant component of the social dimension of sustainable development (NAHA, 2006); its adequacy in terms of quantity and quality plays a dominant role in gauging the level of development as well as indicating a person's standard of living in the society. (Douglass, 2008; Jiboye, 2009). The need for effective housing delivery mechanism to stimulate progressive urbanization in our cities thus constitutes a critical challenge to urban governance and development in Nigeria. The main concern of this paper is to examine this developmental challenge in other to provide a rational for good governance in the management and utilization of existing resources for effective housing delivery.

2. Conceptual Issues

Basic conceptual issues relevant to this discussion include; housing, housing policy, sustainable development and urban governance.

2.1 Housing

Listokin et al. (2007) have defined housing as a permanent structure for human habitation. It is also referred to as the house and defined as a home, building or structure that is a dwelling or place for habitation by human beings. The term "house" includes many kinds of dwellings, ranging from rudimentary huts of nomadic tribes to free standing individual structures (Wikipedia, 2011). Williams (2007) refers to it as a dwelling place, constructed as a home for one or more persons.

It is any type of permanent shelter for man, which gives him an identity (Omoniyi and Jiboye, 2009). Godwin (1998) defined it as “the space that we can call our own, that gives us privacy and shelters us from the weather and intrusions of unwanted people”. Housing in all its ramifications is more than mere shelter. It embraces all the social services and utility that goes to make a community or neighbourhood a live-able environment. (FGN, 1991; Omoniyi and Jiboye, 2009). Housing has become a critical component in the social, economic and health fabric of every nation. Its history is inseparable from the social, economic, cultural and political development of man (Listokin et al., 2007). As a unit of environment, it has a profound influence on the health, efficiency, social behavior, satisfaction, productivity and general welfare of the individual and community. It reflects the cultural social and economic values of a society as it appears the best physical and historical evidence of civilization in a country and a reliable measure or indicator of economic development (Jiboye, 2009).

2.2. Housing Policy

As defined by Wikipedia, (2011), a policy is a principle or rule to guide decisions and achieve rational outcome. It may also refer to the process of making important organizational decisions, including the identification of different alternatives such as programs or spending priorities, and choosing among them on the basis of the impact they will have. Policies can be understood as political, management, financial, and administrative mechanisms arranged to reach explicit goals. Agbola and Alabi (2000) also defined it as a plan of action, a statement of aim and ideas. Housing policy is thus a guideline provided by government which is aimed at meeting the housing need and demand of the people through a set of appropriate strategies including fiscal, institutional, legal and regulatory frameworks (Agbola, 1998). A housing policy therefore provides a guide which delimits action and sets goals but does not necessarily specify any defined strategies for achieving the goal other than broad strategies. It establishes guidelines and limits for discretionary actions by individuals responsible for implementing the overall plans of action (Olatubara, 2002). Duruzoечи (1999) noted that some housing policy decisions (written or implied) express the overall past work of government while others are goal statement or prescription of elemental rules for the conduct of personal or organizational affairs. Policies are thus well reasoned, carefully articulated and presented documents. (Olatubara, 2002). Housing policy is essentially necessary as a guide or control on the various actors in the housing sector. The main objectives of housing policy according to Duruzoечи, (1999), are to obtain the optimum use of existing housing resources in order to ensure adequate housing for the people, guide the location of new housing, and be responsive to the housing needs of special people.

2.3. Sustainable Development

The term “Sustainable development” has been giving some prominence by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), in its 1987 report entitled, “Our Common future”. The Commission defined it as “the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs”. One fundamental premise for sustainable development is the recognition that environment and development is not exclusive of one another, but is complementary and inter-dependent and in the long run mutually reinforcing (Oriola, 2009). This complexity explains the difficulty in operationalizing the concept; and in terms of its definition, Sustainable development stands on three pillars adopted by the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). These pillars include social development, economic development and environmental protection. The primary objective of sustainable development is to reduce absolute poverty as adopted and contained in Agenda 21 and produce a global programme of action for sustainable development in the 21st century. Thus, Agenda 21 stresses the importance of good governance through effective partnerships among stakeholders in improving social, economic and environmental quality in the urban areas (Omoniyi and Jiboye, 2009).

2.4. Urban Governance

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has defined governance as:

“The exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country’s affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences”.

In another contribution, Aluko (2010) defines governance as the act or process of governing a nation, state, or legal entity. It is the activity of governing a country, controlling, ruling, managing, regulating, influencing, or directing a place. Governance recognizes that power exists inside and outside the formal authority and institutions of government. Most formulations of governance recognize government, civil society and the private sector as the key actors. At the local level, these groups can be further specified to include: Central Government, state or provincial government (where applicable), local authorities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), and the private sector.

Governance is a neutral concept; the actors, mechanisms, processes and institutions can produce positive or negative results, hence the notion of “good urban governance”. As stated in the UNDP policy document, good governance is a necessary ingredient to achieve equitable and sustainable growth and development. In order to support the implementation of the Habitat Agenda goal of “sustainable human settlements development in an urbanizing world”, The UN-HABITAT launched the Global Campaign on Urban Governance in 1999. The Campaign’s goal is to contribute to the eradication of poverty through improved urban governance. It aims to increase the capacity of local governments and other stakeholders to practice good urban governance and to raise awareness of and advocate for good urban governance around the world. The campaign is implemented through four principle strategies: normative debate, advocacy, capacity building and knowledge management. An index was developed to support the Campaign’s advocacy and capacity-building strategies. The index has a two-fold purpose: at the global level, the index will be used to demonstrate the importance of good urban governance in achieving broad development objectives, such as the Millennium Development Goals and those in the Habitat Agenda. Organizations such as UN-HABITAT, UNDP and the World Bank have long advocated for increased investments in urban development based on a common argument. The world is increasingly urbanizing, and cities, through their concentrations of population and resources, represent the best entry point for the efficient and effective use of scarce development resources. A World Bank Research in 2002 has demonstrated that good governance correlates with positive development outcomes. The survey concluded that:

“The result of good governance is development that ‘gives priority to the poor, advances the cause of women, sustains the environment, and creates needed opportunities for employment and other livelihood’”.

Five principles of good urban governance consisting of effectiveness, equity, participation, accountability and security were adopted in the UN-Inter-Agency meeting in 2001, and these formed the framework for developing indicators for the Urban Governance Index (UN-HABITAT, 2004). The Agency defines the principles as follows:

- Effectiveness of governance measures efficiency, subsidiarity and strategic vision.
- Equity addresses sustainability, gender equality and intergenerational equity.
- Accountability measures transparency, rule of law and responsiveness.
- Participation includes citizenship, consensus orientation and civic engagement.
- Security addresses conflict resolution, human security and environmental safety.

These principles demonstrate that good urban governance is vital to improving the quality of life in cities. At the global and regional level, the index is expected to facilitate comparison of cities based on the quality of their urban governance. At the local level, the index is expected to catalyze local action to improve the quality of urban governance by developing indicators that respond directly to their unique contexts and needs. Good governance has eight major characteristics. It is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. It assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society (UNDP, 1997).

3. The need for good Urban Governance in Sustainable Housing Development in Nigeria

Recent development in most metropolitan cities of the world has revealed an unprecedented growth rate of the urban areas. Among developing countries, urbanization is greatest in Latin America, where the urban population accounts for 76 percent of the total. In Sub-Saharan Africa, which is largely rural – with only 32 percent of the population living in the urban areas, there is a very high urban growth rate of up to four percent (Ogunleye, 2005; Jiboye, 2009). Today, with an urban population estimated at 37.9 per cent of its total population, Africa ranks with Asia among the least urbanized regions in the world. However, the two regions are currently recording the highest urban growth rates worldwide and, over the next three decades, the greatest increases in urban growth will occur in the least developed countries, most of which are in Africa and Asia (UN-HABITAT, 2010). Although, the Africa continent is presently ranked among the least-urbanized regions of the world, it is however noted for its highest rates of urbanization (Orimogunje et al, 2009). The consequences and realities of this urbanization process are congestion and growth of urban slums in the cities (Ravalin, 2007). Thus, a United Nation’s Habitat estimate had indicated that almost a billion people already live in slum conditions around the world and that slums are growing dramatically within the world’s poorest cities, particularly, in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia (UN-HABITAT, 2007). Existing studies have also shown that the provision of appropriate housing, particularly for the urban poor constitutes a major challenge to development in most African countries and developing nations, at large (Okoye, 1990; Lawanson, 2005; Jiboye and Ogunshakin, 2010).

It has been affirmed that the central problem confronting cities on every continent – particularly with regards to housing provision, is that of governance (Ruble et al, 2011). Cities must cope with great numbers of people, plan to provide services, find resources to meet the needs of maintaining and augmenting infrastructure, respond to urbanization and poverty, preserve their environment and retain their competitive edge (Bharat and Chawla, 2011). As large cities grow in developing areas, the needs of their populations for ordinary services—such as drinking water, sanitary services like trash collection and sewerage, roads, housing, public transport, education and health, become very insistent. Satisfying these needs must be understood in the context of two major trends in the development of urban life. One of these trends is an increasing tendency toward income inequality and social fragmentation; another trend involves the decentralization of key powers and functions from national to municipal governments, at the same time as both civil society and new local institutional arenas become active in the involvement of citizens in the governance of their immediate physical and natural environments (Stren, 2011). Enmeshed in the web of rigid, inflexible working cultures and erosion of all round capacity, cities must re-engineer themselves to face these enormously complex challenges.

This re-engineering is precisely the goal of good urban governance which envisages improving the quality of life through improved local governance by reinventing a city as an inclusive city. Such a city provides space and voice to all its stakeholders through inclusive decision-making; since decision-making is the heart of good governance, and the strategy for achieving the goals of good urban environment is to advocate the norms of good urban governance and promote inclusive decision-making process (Bharat and Chawla, 2011). In Nigeria for instance, considering the size and pace of urbanization, with a national population of over 140million according the 2006 Census, and the country accounting for 1 in every 4 to 5 Africans, while its annual urbanization rate of 5 per cent places it among the highest worldwide; currently, the urban population is about 43 per cent of national figures (UN, 2007; Jiboye, 2009; UN-HABITAT, 2010). The United Nations Development Programme, in its 1998 Human Development Report, had indicated that the inevitable outcome of Nigeria's population explosion is the aggravation of urban blight and squalor, resulting in the majority of urban dwellers living under subhuman conditions in slums and squatter settlements without employment and any visible legitimate means of livelihood" (UN- HABITAT, 2010). Thus, the poor living condition of the urban slum dwellers in Nigeria is compounded by harmful pollution and precarious housing situation (see Plates 1- 3 below).

In the light of these realities, the country can ill-afford to ignore good governance in her cities. Thus, in an attempt to ensure adequate housing delivery, successive governments had at various times in the past initiated several policies and programmes towards resolving the persistent urban housing crisis (FRN, 1991; Achunine, 1993; Olotuah and Bobadoye, 2009). These efforts notwithstanding, little success has so far been recorded as most of the housing projects embarked upon have failed to adequately cater for both the qualitative and quantitative housing needs of the increasing urban population (Jiboye, 2009). Therefore, the problem of inadequate housing in Nigeria does not seem to rest any longer on the absence or lack of relevant policies or programmes per se, but on the lack of commitment on the part of government at ensuring effective and good governance which recognizes the significance of decentralization of decision making and participatory processes, premised on the principles of good urban governance which are effectiveness, equity, participation, accountability and security that were adopted in the UN-Inter-Agency meeting of 2001. Also premised on good governance is the need to ensure sustainability in housing delivery. Thus, the principle of sustainable development as espoused in the Global Agenda 21 which stresses the importance of good governance through effective partnerships among stakeholders in improving social, economic and environmental quality in the urban areas needs to be accorded much significance.

In this regard, urgent steps are required to ensure good urban governance that would coordinate the activities of all relevant Agencies concerned with the development of the urban infrastructures, including housing. In order to accomplish this, a comprehensive housing strategy which focuses on issues of housing supply, affordability, and quality and which ensures that housing is available and affordable for families at all income levels should be developed (CHP, 2011). Such strategies should be developed through inclusive, detailed planning processes in order to facilitate effective use of scarce resources for the benefit of all, particularly the poor.

4. Conclusion

This paper has examined basic issues relating to achieving sustainable development in housing through good urban governance in Nigeria. It noted that the problem of providing adequate housing has long been a concern, not only of the individual but of government as well. In most of our urban centres, this problem is not only restricted to quantity but also to the poor quality of available housing units and the environment (Jiboye, 2009; Olotuah and Ajenifujah, 2009).

To achieve sustainable development, a responsive housing policy must therefore be in consonance with the existing national and socio-economic realities of the country. In this regard, relevant urban and housing development strategies should be identified and integrated to form part of existing housing policy. Part of the strategies should ensure and encourage greater participation of ordinary citizens in the affairs of their city and town through a degree of power decentralized to local authorities. Existing policy or programme should be reviewed and reinvigorated to ensure adequate infrastructural development alongside housing delivery as well as the overall urban development. In Nigeria however, certain parameters need to be considered which should form the basis of the type of housing policy and programmes required to achieve the housing need of the people within available resources. Such parameters include: an overhaul of the economy in the area of availability and cost of building materials; an overhaul of the general trend in interest rate (of mortgage finance) and land prices; a review of the nature and size of household incomes and, a general review of other economic consideration that could militate or promote housing (Ezenagu, 2000).

From all indications, the above parameters should be considered before one develops a housing policy. It is also necessary to understand how the people live in terms of the type and quality of environment; how these have affected their productivity and performance in the economy in terms of minimum standards of space, dwelling types and community facilities they could access. Existing policies should be reviewed to address the issues of design, location and such others that may relate to infrastructural provision, sub-urban fringe, city center development and new communities. Most of the above issues do not form part of existing housing policy in Nigeria. In other to evolve a suitable housing policy, other fundamental areas that need to be covered include: attitude to ownership; issues of rent control and subsidies; mortgage finance and; the issues of power sharing and function at the different levels of government and organization within the country. Such policy should also focus more on the urban areas where the poor people with diverse social problems are concentrated. It should be concerned with renewal, slum upgrading, and slum clearance of the affected areas.

The questions that readily come to mind are; how do we improve the quality of life of the urban residents?; and what should be the appropriate response to the issue of providing adequate housing in other to achieve sustainability? Perhaps, the answer lies within the ambit of “collaboration and commitment” by all concerned agents of development – comprising of governments, professionals and the people at large.



Plate 1: Precarious and deplorable living condition of the urban poor (prone to outbreak of epidemics)



Plate 2: Unhealthy living condition in dwellings (water source exposed to epidemics)



Plate 3: Typical makeshift toilet facilities available to house holds living in urban slums (refuse dung seen at the foreground)

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