

GLOBALIZATION AND SOCIAL PATHOLOGIES: RETHINKING THE STATE OF

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## CHAPTER THREE

### SUSTAINABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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#### **Abstract**

*This chapter discusses the conceptual, theoretical and empirical issues surrounding housing development in general and homelessness in particular relying on secondary data. It points to the sociological significance of homelessness for an individual or the group to which he or she belongs and also cites local examples to buttress the position. The chapter examines the causes of the problem, alludes to some kinds of homeless people, addresses consequences of the phenomenon and suggests sustainable strategies to mitigate the social problem. The kernel of the chapter is that socio-cultural needs of the people should be taken into consideration when housing needs and policies are conceived and evaluated. The vulnerable groups such as destitute and aged who cannot meet their housing needs should be considered when housing policies of the nation are being conceived. The wishes of the majority of the citizenry must not be jettisoned on the platform of professionalism. This must recognize the inherent community's limited resources and constraints. The contrary will be elitist and exclusionary. The chapter contends that reform in government public policy such as monetization among public sector employees is not sufficient to attack homelessness as this excludes majority of Nigerians who live below the poverty line and do not work for government-owned establishment. More importantly, it is necessary to adopt strategies that are inclusive, participatory and ensure sustainable housing development for all.*

**Key Words:** Sustainable Housing; Homelessness, Vulnerable Groups

### **Introduction**

Of all man's basic needs, housing undoubtedly constitutes one of the greatest concerns. According to Maslow, housing/shelter is one of the basic needs of homo-sapiens. It protects humans against the vagaries of weather, affords privacy, rest and comfort (Animashaun, 1992:3; Fashola, 1992:6, Ajanlekoko, 2001: 1). Paradoxically, there is yawning gap between supply and demand of housing, leading to astronomical cost of rented dwellings. In this sense, a number of people are deprived of housing comfort inadvertently or deliberately. The former may be due to poverty while the latter may ensue from forced eviction by anti-people policies of government. It is possible that many people including the rich may not have access to houses of their own choice or maintain those which they reside in. Building plans are often not followed to specification leading to preventable collapse of buildings. Adequate supervision is ignored; some building contractors use wrong/inadequate materials for construction in order to cut corners. Officers who are supposed to detect the faults may look the other way. Corruption is rife. Poverty stares people in the face. Because of dearth of accommodation, there is overcrowding, slum eruption, sub-standard houses with manifest and unintended consequences in many parts of the country such as Makoko, Ijora Badia, Mushin in Lagos, among others.

Few Nigerians live in expensive accommodation. Some live in slum areas like Makoko and Ijora Badia, suburb parts of Lagos and during raining season, they are chased out of their makeshift houses. At other time, it is the government that rolls out the bulldozers to demolish the "shanty" houses. Some individuals are chased out involuntarily by forces of internal displacement such as war (civil war), flood (Ogunpa disaster), ethnic conflicts (Idi-Araba in Lagos, and Jos); bomb blast (Ikeja Bomb Blast on January 27, 2002) or government policy as it occurred in Maroko in 1991 when residents were given seven days notice or no notice at all and again Lagos between April



27-29, 2005 when many residents were turned homeless when the bulldozers demolished their homes (see "The Wire" October 2006, Nigeria Amnesty International).

Most of the slum settlements are devoid of basic amenities such as toilet and kitchen. Overcrowding is common in sub urban areas like Ajegunle, Makoko, and Ijora Badia to mention a few. Incidence of communicable diseases like pulmonary tuberculosis is high. There is massive rural-urban drift, which has compounded the shortage of existing housing stock in the urban areas leading to acute housing shortage (Okunneye, et.al. 2006). According to the National Rolling Plan, 1990-1992; the national housing requirement is between 500,000 and 600,000 units considering the prevailing occupancy ratio of between three and four persons per room. In the light of all these, how can we provide houses to the homeless, take care of the vulnerable individuals and achieve sustainable housing development in Nigeria? This is the challenge of the paper.

## **Objectives**

The basic objectives of the chapter include interrogating the efforts of the government in Nigeria in providing adequate houses to her citizenry. A review of the policy gaps reveals anti-people policies and reforms whereby occupied and built-up areas are destroyed without providing alternatives that are sustainable to the people. Of recent, the ejection of civil servants from the houses which they have occupied for years was noticed. The paper is divided into five main sections. In addition to introduction, the second part clarifies some of the key concepts and examines the causes of homelessness; the third explores the typologies of homeless people while the fourth highlights the consequences of homelessness and draws the policy implications. The fifth section concludes with a sociological perspective offering sustainable strategies in order to achieve a balanced housing development in Nigeria.

## Sustainable Development

## Sustainable Housing Development

## Who is Homeless?

- i. a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodation...
- ii. an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized or
- iii. a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

This definition refers to those persons who are literally homeless - that is, those on the streets or in shelters - and persons who face imminent eviction (within a week) from a private dwelling or institution and who have no subsequent residence or resources to

## Theoretical Issues

Pertinent literature points out that the state is largely responsible for the housing crisis of the last years in developing countries. The lack of affordable rental housing, the simultaneous increase in the cost of the former social phenomenon, the high cost and poor quality of housing technologies, inadequate social services, eviction of citizens by the market, and rapid Urbanization forces a state to intervene to explain the housing situation and to tackle it to achieve sustainable development of homes for the masses. On the other hand, state intervention is not. The Federal Office of Statistics (1996) shows that 76.5 in 1999 (Mammola and Mammola, 1987) and Animashaun (1997) show that residential housing for the poor is not that the conditions, in the last 20 years. Persons living in poverty are more likely to be demographic groups who are also more likely to experience poverty who may have lost control of their lives and gratuity.



obtain housing. The definition has been criticized to serve only large, urban communities, where tens of thousands of people are literally homeless. However, it may prove problematic for those persons who are homeless in rural areas, where there are more houses than people. Individuals experiencing homelessness in these areas are less likely to live on the street or in a shelter, and more likely to live with relatives or in substandard housing. Like Iyagba (2005:57) argued, it is a social responsibility of the government and also the governed to ensure that the wish of the majority in terms of housing is achieved within limited resources and constraints.

### **Theoretical Issues**

Pertinent literature point accusing fingers to two trends as being largely responsible for the rise in homelessness over the past 15-20 years in developing countries such as Nigeria: a growing shortage of affordable rental houses in relation to population growth and a simultaneous increase in poverty (Okunneye, et.al. 2006). The former social phenomenon is further worsened by inadequate and high cost and poor distribution of building materials and technologies, inadequate mortgage fund, housing loan, forced eviction of citizens by government and epileptic housing policy. Urbanization forces and population expansion have intertwined to explain the housing shortage in Nigeria (Badru, 2004). This must be tackled to achieve sustainable housing development and affordable homes for the masses.

On the other hand, statistics of poverty in Nigeria as compiled by the Federal Office of Statistics (FOS) is scary. It rose from 46% in 1985 to 76.5 in 1999 (Mamman, 2000:4 cited in Badru, 2002:115). Oyekanmi (1987) and Animashaun (1992: 156) provided a detailed analysis of residential housing facilities in Lagos. Oyekanmi, (1987) found out that the conditions, in general, depict poverty of people and places. Persons living in poverty are most at risk of becoming homeless, and demographic groups who are more likely to experience poverty are also more likely to experience homelessness. These include the aged who may have lost consistent income and rely on inadequate pension and gratuity.



The United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, (1996) alludes to the poverty of the people and lack of community involvement in the provision of housing. "The poor are not just passive objects. Most often they are solving their own problems but governments are failing to recognize their efforts. Instead of harnessing their energy, they are discouraging them from participating in the improvement of their own living conditions".

There are many well-documented examples of communities taking charge of their housing needs despite little or no government assistance. For instance, in South Africa, a popular movement tagged: "The South African Homeless Peoples Federation" (SAHPeF) encouraged the local communities to organize themselves into informal savings groups to build their own houses. From about early 1990's, the federation actualized about 14,000 low-cost houses built by the people who are former slum-dwellers. Many of these are women. On the other hand, Nigeria tends to adopt a top-bottom approach where the government conceives and actualizes all the dreams of shelter, then imposes the dream on the citizenry. Many of the houses are too expensive and sited in places out of the reach of common men and women. The so-called low cost houses apparently constructed for the low income people are hijacked by the rich and thus become exclusionary to the poor and the vulnerable like the aged. This negates the spirit of sustainable housing.

In peripheral developing countries such as Nigeria, the problems of providing decent accommodation are further worsened by governance issues, politicking, poor accountability, lack of capacity and appointment of wrong professionals into wrong places. These hinder effective housing management. Government tends to dub existing slums as illegal, deny them essential amenities and services, and in some cases, as it is found in Abuja currently, the slums and 'corner shops' are demolished without alternatives for the people. This worsens the housing situation. The partnership and trust that need to be built between the public, civil society and government is shattered.

## **Aetiology of Homelessness**

The literature is replete with a number of causes of homelessness. Some of these include lack of affordable housing and poverty caused by many factors. Other reasons include natural disasters, mental illness, substance abuse, forced eviction by government, arbitrary increase of house rent by shylock landlords/landladies and problems emanating from structural adjustment policies, among others, (Secretary General's message on UN World Habitat Day, October, 2008, Okunneye, et.al, 2006).

## **Impact of Homelessness**

It has been argued that the rates of both chronic and acute health problems are extremely high among the homeless population. With the exception of obesity, stroke and cancer, homeless people are far more likely to suffer from every category of chronic health problem (Okunneye, et.al, 2006). It can be safely asserted that conditions, which require regular, uninterrupted treatment, such as tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, diabetes, hypertension, addictive and mental disorders, among others, are extremely difficult to treat or control among those without adequate housing.

Many homeless people have multiple health problems. For example, leg ulcers and upper respiratory infections are frequent, often the direct result of homelessness. Homeless people are also at greater risk of trauma which may arise from beatings and rape. Homelessness precludes good nutrition, good personal hygiene, and basic first aid; these add to the complex health needs of homeless people. In addition, some homeless people with mental disorders may use drugs or alcohol to self-medicate, and those with addictive disorders are also often at risk of HIV and other communicable diseases (NCH Fact Sheet, 1999). Besides, a homeless person feels inadequate; his self worth and dignity are called to question. Borrowing from Abraham Maslow's scheme, the basic need of shelter of such individual is left unmet.



## **Strategies against Homelessness**

While the causes of homelessness are complex, there are a number of things that individuals and government can do to assist. A scientific study could be done to unravel the trends and dimensions of homelessness in the country. Besides, different skills, interests and resources could be harnessed to address the hydra headed issue. Volunteer work, advocacy efforts, and contribution of money, clothes, food and services are all important to address the phenomenon of homelessness or to mitigate its consequences. The end to homelessness is a long one. Contributions in cash and kind are important to alleviate the homeless' miseries. Donation of household goods or others like kitchen utensils, furniture and books can be handy.

Volunteer Work is relevant, for instance, shortly after the Ikeja bomb blast, which displaced a number of people on Jan. 27, 2002, the volunteers and government officials were overwhelmed with trying to meet people's basic needs. The victims were given food, clothing and necessary out of the counter drugs.

Advocacy is critical and denotes working with homeless people to bring about positive changes in policies and programmes on the local, state and federal levels. Liaising with state or national assemblies and private sector to develop and monitor workable strategies can be useful. One can also speak in favour of low-income housing and group homes or call and write in the media to show concern for the homeless people.

## **Policy Issues**

There is a Nigerian National Housing Policy which enunciates important milestones to be reached in the country. It is observed that many of these milestones like housing for all by the year 2000 has not been attained. Has the Policy not failed? There seems to be discordant arrangement between the state and the federal government on housing. Granted that housing is on concurrent legislative list, there is still a need for an effective and proper coordination of housing stock in the country. Many of the low-income houses tend to be hijacked by the opulent in the society, thus excluding the poor further. What

happens to the widows, widowers, the aged, the poor, and people with disabilities? What kinds of provisions does the government make for them? Most of the housing estates are hardly affordable by these people? Recently, the Lagos State Government established the Home Ownership Made Easy (H.O.M.E) Scheme. In reality, this scheme is hardly 'easy' for the masses. The cost of building is skyrocketing every day. This pushes the house rent higher. An individual needs to pay for two to three years as house rent (up front) in addition to payment of additional 20% payment for agency and agreement fees as well as security deposit and electricity fee in some instances. The respective tenant may be lucky if he/she is not swindled. The landlords discriminate against unmarried women whom house owners and caretakers tend to consider as 'irresponsible'. This further aggravates the condition of homelessness among the unmarried women folk. The government needs to look into all these and the attitude has to change. There is a need for policy shift to redress these policy gaps.

The activities of the Nigerian Government through the Federal Ministry of Works and Housing are highlighted under the relevant programme areas: providing adequate shelter for all; improving human settlement management; promoting sustainable land use planning and management; promoting the integrated provision of environmental infrastructure such as water, sanitation, drainage and solid waste management; promoting human settlement planning and management in disaster prone areas; promoting sustainable construction industry activities; and promoting human resource development and capacity building for human settlement development. The Government's decision to implement these programmes was based on the resolution adopted at the First United Nations Conference on Human Settlement (Habitat) held in Vancouver, Canada in 1976.

Efforts were made to provide land requirements for human settlement development through sustainable physical planning and land use. A major action in this direction is the on-going review of the 1978 Land Use Act. The review is geared towards making land resources more



readily accessible for sustainable human settlement. The Nigerian Urban and Regional Planning Law was promulgated in 1992 to regulate and guide spatial planning at all levels of government. The Federal statute has been adopted and is being implemented nationwide as a model for other levels of government.

The National Housing Policy was formulated and launched in 1991. The document outlines policies and strategies to provide decent housing for all by the year 2000 or in the shortest possible time. A fall-out of the policy is the establishment of the Housing Policy Council to monitor activities in the housing sector and evaluate policy impact on the sector. The council regularly collects data and publishes information on the state of the housing sector. But eight years after the target, it can be said that the goal has not been achieved. Could this be because the people were not carried along? A sociological approach would have taken the norms, traditions and values of people into consideration to make the policy sustainable.

Nigeria has witnessed a rapid rate of urbanization in the last two decades. The growth rate of urban population in Nigeria was estimated to be close to 6 percent per year. Between 1970 and 1980, the proportion of Nigerians living in urban areas was estimated to have grown from 16 to more than 20 percent. In 1990, there were twenty-one states capitals in Nigeria, each estimated to have more than 100,000 inhabitants; and by 2010, urban population is expected to be more than 40 percent of the nation's total (Oluwasola, 2007). It is estimated that over 40% of the Nigerian population now live in urban areas. The rapid rate of urbanization has brought with it some significant problems including a shortage of housing, overcrowding, traffic congestion, environmental degradation, inadequate infrastructure and services, among others. In recognition of these problems, the National Rolling Plans since 1990 have factored in National Housing Policy instruments for implementing the National Housing Programme. Furthermore, the National Housing Fund and an Infrastructural Development Fund have been put in place to facilitate the attainment of the goals of sustainable human settlement in the country.

Some salient strategies include among others, adopting

- an integrated approach to the provision of water, electricity, sanitation, drainage, and solid waste management both in urban and rural areas
- ensuring appropriate implementation and monitoring of master plans for major towns where they exist, and preparation and implementation of new ones where they are non-existent or out of date
- raising awareness on environmental issues needed for sustainable human settlements
- commencing and ensuring the implementation of the National plan of action for sustainable human settlement development in Nigeria
- improving rural economies through the development of cottage and agro-allied industries to create job opportunities for rural dwellers, and thereby stem the tide of rural-urban migration
- providing not less than 75% of rural communities with social amenities to stimulate and sustain self-reliant development to curb rural-urban migration
- encouraging private sector and community participation in urban renewal activities, housing, and infrastructural provision
- developing and implementing guidelines for effective land resources management
- establishing a National Human Settlement Data Bank (SHSDB) to provide baseline information that can be used to better plan for sustainable human settlements
- renewing all existing slum areas and preventing conditions that may lead to the development of new ones
- promoting the development of parks and gardens, and ensuring retention of adequate natural green areas within human settlements to maintain ecological balance and amenity as being done presently in Lagos State
- promoting easy access to land, especially for low income families
- improving the revenue base for human settlement management.
- Revisiting the Land Use Act (1978).



### **Assessment of Government Programmes**

Further to the achievement of the goal of improving urban management, Nigeria is participating in the Sustainable Cities Programme (SCP) under the urban management programme (UMP) of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlement (UNCHS)/World Bank/United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Under the programme, the Sustainable Ibadan Project (SIP) is being implemented. Through the initiative, local governments, NGOs, Community Based Organizations (CBOs), and private individuals are encouraged to participate and contribute to urban improvement and management. The process of replicating the sustainable city programme has already begun. Two other cities, Kano and Enugu have commenced their projects. The sustainable Kano Project has already prepared the Kano environment profile study forming the basis for consultative actions on the management of Metropolitan Kano. The SCP emphasizes the two-way relationship between development and environment which promotes better awareness and understanding of the priority issues to be addressed in urban environment and development, better understanding of modern urban and environmental management approaches, and the most effective and lasting impact.

In addition to efforts of the Government toward the achievement of the objectives of programmes under the Infrastructure Development Fund Programme, the Urban Basic Services Programme (UBS) is being undertaken in the country to promote the integrated provision of environmental infrastructure, water, sanitation, drainage, and solid waste management. The project involves the identification of core areas in some Nigerian cities and the packaging of improvement programmes targeted at women and children.

### **Challenges**

In the Government's various efforts at attaining sustainable human settlement, several constraints to planning and implementation of physical development have been experienced. These constraints include: rapid rate of urbanization; declining socioeconomic standards and fund limitations. Others include human resource deficiencies, lack of political will and un-integrated policy focus.

Moreover, dearth of base maps, inadequate database for planning and monitoring and insufficient foreign technical assistance are other challenges.

Future planning for emergency preparedness and management should aim at mitigating promptly the negative impacts of natural and man-made disasters on human settlements, the national economy and the environment. Nigeria has had a number of emergency situations arising from natural and man-made disasters. The natural phenomena include tropical storms, land erosion, windstorms, floods, coastal erosion, wildfire and landslides. These have affected the stock of housing in the country in the sense that even if there are adequate houses, the natural or man-made disasters will deplete the stock of housing for the people. Other potential hazards include earthquakes and volcanoes which have so far been uncommon in this country. The major man-made hazards include civil strife and technological episodes such as oil spills, hazardous wastes dumping, and industrial accidents. All of these hazards call for urgent action in strengthening the emergency preparedness to reduce peoples' vulnerability and cushion the impact of disasters on settlements, the economy, and the environment. These measures may then engender more housing stocks for the citizenry.

### **Conclusion**

It is seen from the above that many factors can negate sustainable housing development in any community. The individuals, civil societies and government all have a stake in ensuring sustainable housing development. People are highly attached to their shelter and homes. Everything must be done to provide decent homes for the citizenry. Appointment of right professionals like architects, building and civil engineers, town planners, among others, who are motivated in terms of promoting conducive environment to operate must be put in place. Regular maintenance activities of building, incorporating maintenance culture in existing housing stock, implementing the stipulated housing planning statute in order to prevent collapse of building should be put in place. It is also imperative to provide some micro-credits for people to build their houses and involve them in the conception, implementation and monitoring of the established housing units.



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