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## Reshaping housing pedagogy and public policy through documentaries in Lagos, Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

Academics, in their roles as higher education teachers and researchers continually face the need to draw the attention of various audiences to compelling issues in their cities. In this article, we present examples of how documentaries can be used to communicate to students and policy makers in a more realistic and engaging way. We show how the two academic co-authors improved academic and non-academic learning outcomes by adopting student made documentaries as a pedagogical tool in teaching a final year class about deep-rooted housing problems in Lagos. We also show the role academia can play in documentary production to enable research communication to the policy sector. We point out that academia must be able to transform from their roles as teachers and as researchers, to explore other non-printed traditional communication routes so as to engage more effectively with their end-users. Thus, the use of documentaries must be contextualised and adopted with recognition of newer forms of engagement, such as social media. Nevertheless, we promote the tremendous value of documentaries as both a pedagogical and social advocacy tool in the housing sector.

**KEYWORDS** Housing documentary; housing pedagogy; housing problems; Kelechi's Quest

### Introduction

Housing inequality in Lagos finds expression in the ratio of the population that live in inadequate housing in slum and informal communities, the typology of which varies. There are inner city slums with their colonial origin heritage found in swathes across communities such as Mushin, Somolu, Ilesatedo and Obalende to mention a few, and there are waterfront slums such as Makoko and Iwaya which are attractive to migrants from riverine rural areas. There are also informal communities that emerge from the

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City's peripheral areas such as Idimu, Egbe, Ikotun, Ojo, Ajagbandi amongst others (The Lagos State Government, 2013). Then there are 'estate slums' which are public housing projects that have deteriorated due to lack of provision and maintenance of basic infrastructure. In between these there are shanties and illegal shelters. However, a unifying factor across these communities is the decrepit environmental condition and lack of social amenities such as water supply and health facilities.

Causal factors attributed to slum proliferation in Lagos include highly unaffordable housing options in relatively, better serviced, residential, employment and commercial zones such as Victoria Island, Lekki and Ikeja to mention a few. Housing unaffordability itself is caused by several interconnected factors, such as poverty, low income levels, high land values in planned neighbourhoods, and lack of widespread, structured finance to promote long term investment in decent housing (CAHF, 2018, Lall et al., 2017). This is in addition to socio-cultural factors that make residents reluctant to leave communities in which they have generational linkages. When these are connected with the high migration rates into Lagos, the demand for housing in the formal market far outstrips supply. Residents continually seek cheap accommodation that is to be found in informal, slum and peri-urban communities. For home-ownership, they resort to incremental housing construction in areas far from the city where land is cheaper and more accessible. Unfortunately, the urban planning response to slum emergence has been quite slow, such that new communities become entrenched before government action occurs.

All of these issues have been taught in the classroom of various courses in higher education in Nigeria and have been analysed critically from various disciplinary perspectives, producing quite a large volume of research publications in local and international journals. Going by the current stalemate in housing provision and the spate of forceful evictions of residents of informal communities in Lagos, there is a growing sense of urgency in the need to engage government more effectively in research processes if these efforts are ever to enjoy implementation. There are also concerns amongst academia and civil society that their efforts at influencing government policy has not yielded much response in recent times.

Direct 'calling out' on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and networking apps on mobile devices has become attractive to interest groups and individuals in asserting good governance (Williams-Elegbe, 2014). On the other hand, academics have themselves been called out on the way they disseminate outcomes of research that could potentially benefit society. Rogers and Herbert (2019) observe the pressure being laid on academics to disseminate the political and social implications of their work to non-academic audiences. This is required to strengthen and sustain linkages between the research-policy interface.

This article addresses the problem by showing how housing researchers/academics might use documentaries as a means of reaching out to both their students and the policy sector. We develop our article around two research questions: How can academia adopt the use of documentaries in teaching housing problems in cities like Lagos? What role can academia play in documentary production to enable research communication to the policy sector? Addressing these questions will provide academia with workable strategies for interfacing with end-users they seek to influence (students, communities and communities). In laying out the paper, we examine the values and critique of documentary making, and we also show the ethics associated with documentaries. Then we answer the research questions by providing examples of our work on self-made documentaries with undergraduate students and on a policy driven documentary series.

### Documentary value and critique

Nichols (2001) observed that the documentary is a unique genre that could be contrasted to filmmaking in the sense that its maker sets aside his or her own imagination to focus on a reality, a 'real life' event that has occurred in the past or is playing out in the current. Its participants are social actors that play out their own lives, and are engaged as experts on the strength of the knowledge and experience they have to share about an occurrence or event. Maccarone (2010) aptly described documentaries as a practice of a social institution.

While documentaries are acknowledged as playing a role in social policy changes, it is not generally agreed that documentaries have impacted on housing policy. In a review of the 1935 documentary titled 'housing problems' which portrayed the abysmal housing conditions of the poor working class in Britain, film scholar and producer Winston criticised the viability of documentaries as a tool for making changes in housing policy, stressing that 50 years of documentary making in Britain has not produced any changes in policies towards addressing housing problems. In response, Nichols (2001) pointed out that the documentary is not the only agent of change in influencing housing policy, but a tool that is constrained by the 'politics of representation' in the larger arena of social debate and contestation, meaning the institutions that are meant to be responsive to the arguments proffered by documentaries are also conditioned by politics of priority of interventions. This implies that documentaries can be used as supportive tools of engagement and may not necessarily be the substantive tool of research communication, and are useful in as much as the prevailing political and institutional environment is taken into consideration.

Another critique raised by Winston is the issue of ethical consideration in documentary filmmaking. In documentary film production where people are participants because of their special knowledge and experience, there is a risk of exploiting this knowledge to improve the argument set out by the filmmaker and there are also risks of unintended consequences for the social actors (Maccarone, 2010; Nichols, 2001). Winston has been cited (in Maccarone, 2010) as asserting that the legal framework in documentary filmmaking is too loose to compel or even encourage ethical practices in the industry, and this might be traced to the freelance nature of the industry. Kara and Reestorff (2015) also called attention to the almost habitual misrepresentation of subjects and observed that this calls into question the credibility of documentaries.

The remedy here is for the filmmaker to ensure 'informed consent' by all participants. Informed consent originated in the field of medical ethics (Sanders, 2013) and is used extensively in anthropology, sociology and related research disciplines (Nichols 2001). Informed consent means informing the social actors of the rationale of the project, the possible consequences of their participation. However, Nichols (2001) observed that there are always issues surrounding how much of those consequences can reasonably be predicted by the filmmaker and this is the basis of Winston's criticism. For instance, when residents of informal communities participate in a documentary to protest government neglect over the years, can the filmmaker predict a political backlash against the community by the government? Can the community members be assured that they will not be forcefully evicted due to exposure by the documentary? If this happens, should that be an ethical burden on the filmmaker? Nevertheless, other writers in recent times such as Maccarone (2010), Nichols (2001) and Sanders (2013) have called for stronger ethical considerations with Maccarone emphasising the atmosphere for consent: noncoercive; and the amount of information: sufficient enough to reasonably accept to participate.

For academics seeking more effective means of communicating housing problems, especially qualitative deficiencies, documentaries offer an alternative. Where people are placed at the centre of the issues, and agree to show how they live to the world, the documentary's focus on reality, the accompanying strong visuals and purposive story-telling narrative makes the genre particularly suitable to convince viewers about the need for change. Thus, academics can utilise documentaries to project hidden realities in an open way to a diversity of audiences including policy makers and students.

In the next section, we present an example of how we use documentaries to teach housing problems in Lagos and the impact of failure of affordable housing policy.

## How can academics adopt the use of documentaries in teaching housing problems in cities like Lagos? An example of student-produced documentary

There has been a long debate over the adequacy of the planning and real estate curriculum in preparing students for the world of work and in solving 'real life' problems. A detailed discussion of these concerns can be found in Odendaal (2012) and Diaw et al. (2002). The impact of a curriculum is determined by the way the lessons are taught, the environment in which they are taught and the student's engagement and understanding of issues raised. Hence, we argue that emphasis should be laid on the teaching and learning pedagogies, in addition to curriculum reviews. However, the literature on planning pedagogies is thin compared to academic articles that call for curriculum reviews. A focus on the pedagogy rather than the curriculum influenced our approach to teaching the course we report on.

In Nigeria, undergraduate students of real estate management are required by the Nigerian National Universities Commission to take the course Applied Town Planning (with 2 Credit Points) as a compulsory course. The course is oriented towards providing students with an understanding of urbanisation processes and solutions to urban problems with a specific focus on slum and informal communities and urban regeneration amongst other topics. It is taken at the fifth (and final) year by undergraduate students in Estate Management at the University of Lagos. It is taken in two semesters, with the first semester focused on urban problem identification and the second on presenting solutions to problems identified in the first semester. We report on our approach for the first semester. It is a compulsory course comprising up to 14 weeks of lectures and taught by the two academic co-authors. There is a field work component taken from the 4<sup>th</sup> week of lectures after students have been taught some of the theoretical aspects of the course and after they have read the assigned key text of the course.

The key text assigned for the course is *Urbanization in Nigeria* by Akin L Mabogunje, which was published by the University of London Press in 1968. In twelve chapters, the book provides a narrative of the pre- and colonial origins of Nigerian cities. In chapters ten and eleven, it dwelt on Lagos in particular, providing rich insights into the origins of Lagos and also vivid descriptions of its residential districts as they were in that period. These chapters on Lagos particularly stimulate interest in the undergraduate class that is predominantly composed of young people that experience Lagos more as a home (or their place of higher education) than as an object of enquiry. The text was chosen not because it is the only text that had dealt with housing problems in Lagos (there are varied journal articles, text books on the subject matter), but because it encased the problem of housing deprivation within the context of urbanisation, tracing the historical lack of

housing policy and relating the consequences of various intervention measures to the (then) current state of the communities. The author also recounted with vivid specificity the housing and neighbourhood conditions of 21 communities in Lagos. The period of fifty one years between the text publication and 2019 was deemed sufficient to ensure an appreciation of the depth of the long neglect and lack of intervention to ameliorate living conditions in these communities. There are also other more recent works by the same author, but they do not provide the same breadth of interconnection between the history of urbanisation in Nigeria, the application of urban growth and development theories and several other topics that the course covers. This accounts for why the textbook is seen as still relevant for the course and it is discussed in class before the field assignment so as to provide students with an appreciable theoretical grounding for the assignment.

At chapter 11 “residential districts of Lagos”, Mabogunje (1968) classified 21 communities into four grades of high, medium, lower medium and low, based on the quality of neighbourhood amenities and rental values.

He described lower medium grade residential districts as constituting:

*an oasis of planned layouts in a wilderness of confused housing... with Idumagbo Avenue a wide street of which the traffic flow has considerably reduced by the crowd of petty traders lining it on both sides with their movable counters (Mabogunje 1968, 302)*

He also classified areas that had never been planned, such as Faji, Idumashagbe, Mushin, Yaba East, Somolu and so on as Low-Grade Residential Districts. In 1968, these areas were inhabited by basically low-income people and indigenous residents. These were described as

*including the oldest districts on Lagos Island with their narrow, confused lanes and generally poor housing conditions.’ (Mabogunje 1968, 303)*

The task before us was to ascertain the current state of these communities. Previously, Students were required to read the key text on their own within a four week time period, with concurrent class-based discussions on selected chapters every week. After this, they would be randomly allocated into groups of between 8 and 10 (depending on the class size) and would together undertake a visit to designated slum communities in Lagos. Then, the communities were allocated on the basis of geographical proximity to the University and, session after session, students went to the same communities. They would write a report on their visit, detailing their impression of the physical, environmental and social conditions of the community. They were encouraged to take photographs where permitted and then make presentations in class. So, while students undertook field work, there was no direct linkage between the key text and the communities visited.

The impact was that even though they had read the description of several slum communities in the key text, in many instances over the years that we have taught the course, students would sometimes argue that the conditions described were from 'way back then' and those communities could not possibly still be so today. Thus, a recurring problem was how to effectively capture the scale of the problems that as teachers-researchers, we knew still existed in these communities. One possibility was to share on-going research findings with them, and another was to introduce a more visually stimulating engagement method. The latter was preferred and the adoption of a documentary was seen as fulfilling this option. However, available documentaries in this area for Lagos were limited in scope, with recent efforts focusing on problems in specific communities. What are very common are news items on national TV with brief accounts of past policy failures as a prelude to programme segments on housing or urban issues. These were not deemed sufficient to portray the depth of the problem. There are foreign documentaries on housing problems such as 'The Pruitt-Igoe Myth' which provides a strong story of the demise of the Pruitt-Igoe public apartments in St Louis, and how apartment blocks that were built to replace a slum became derelict and riddled with so much violence and insecurity that it had to be demolished. Although Madden (2012) described it as one of the best documentaries about urban development, we wanted the students to feel the problems in their own city.

This was why we introduced the preparation of short videos on the slum communities identified in the key-text in the 2017/2018 session. Thus, students were asked to self-produce, using their personally owned media devices, a documentary on 8 communities selected from the lower medium and low-grade residential districts identified by Professor Mabogunje in 1968. The 8 residential districts are: Mushin, Yaba East, Obalende, Ojuelegba, Ebute Metta West, Ebute Ero, Idumagbo and Somolu. They were selected on the basis of their being featured as slum areas in reports such as the SNC Lavallin Report of 1995. Students were tasked to answer the question:

'The residential districts of Lagos from 1968 to date: Has anything changed?'

At the first presentation of the task of documentary making as a way to learn about housing problems, students were a bit apprehensive. The apprehension was dimmed when the academic co-authors showed feedback and work done by students from previous sets, also linking to future opportunities for career development in a country with significant graduate unemployment rates. The students had also been given an assignment guide for the project. Moreover, they were reassured that assessments was not to be based on the technical quality of the documentary production, but rather on the ability of the group to answer the question posed and to relate the key-text they had reviewed to the situation on the ground. This



tensions of lack of capacity in documentary production which is justifiable given that we did not have the opportunity to train them before going to field. Similar reaction is recorded by other Higher Education teachers, such as Hussain (2012) and Foster and Yaoyuneyong (2016) on initial push-back amongst students when a new pedagogical activity is introduced, and a gradual easing and growth of enthusiasm when provided with more information and the task commences.

With reference to theories, our approach aligns with Bing Chen's (Chen, 2015) description of inquiry-based learning; a process where students are actively involved in the process of research, instead of being informed, while also fostering the notion of academic education as participation in research. It can also be associated with the theory of social constructivism which lays emphasis on providing opportunities to students to make their own judgements and interpretations of the situations they come across, using their prior knowledge and experience (Hussain, 2012).

The group work format facilitated the process of learning from peers, and the random selection of students into groups that we adopted was meant to reduce selection bias in gender, socio-economic background, academic attainment, life skills, religion, friendship and other extraneous factors. So, each group consisted of a dynamic set of individuals. Students were encouraged to visit the communities and document their observations. They were also expected to synthesise their thoughts into the process of documentary making and then make their own judgement of the state of the communities between 1967 till date, and by extension, to engage in critical thinking on the reasons for perpetuation of slum communities in the city. Leaning on the various learning theories identified by Olesen (2018), Sharkova (2014) and Thurlings and van Diggelen (2019) the use of the documentary assignment moved our work towards inquiry-based learning, from behaviourism, where students reproduce what teachers have told them, and cognitivism, where the reading of the text and processing of the information to answer examination questions occurred, as well as socio-cultural learning where we had classroom discussions on the key-text. We also move from Piaget's individual constructivism which could have occurred with individual field trips, to Vygotsky's social constructivism as the assignment was group based.

However, there are opinions such as Mathieson's (2012), which argue that social constructivism as pedagogy is seriously flawed in failing to account for the significance of disciplinary knowledge in higher education learning in particular. In our case, this is ameliorated by the fact that the students, being in the final year (of a 5 year course), had been taught the theoretical aspects of the course in the second semester of their third year. Thus, the knowledge gained by students from this and other courses

offered in the department, are regarded as being sufficient to address the issue of lack of sound disciplinary knowledge associated with social constructivism. In any case, it can also be argued that the adoption of social constructivism would take place within the crucible of specific disciplinary knowledge and thus, students are required to contextualise their learning towards that disciplinary focus, since learning cannot occur in a vacuum.

We faced some limitations however. There was no formal training for students in documentary and video editing before going to field, even though feedback was given on this during the presentation. This is an aspect we look to improve on in the future. However, students had been requested to carry out their editing using free online resources, which also provided room for team work, creativity, on-line search capacities and evaluation of choices. Earlier interactions also show that some had core artistic skills including in commercial photography, music editing, fashion and so on which could also enhance the work. The students had varying academic and intellectual capacities and experiences, with different socio-economic backgrounds, which also influenced the lens through which they saw the communities, also requiring an agreement on common set of principles by which to make their presentations. The integration of learning on their own, learning with others outside the classroom, making meaning of the state of the neighbourhoods, putting their recordings together, assigning tasks such as editing and voice-overs, as well as background music all enabled students learn through a social constructivism pedagogy.

However, they were provided with strictly delivered ethical guidelines.

1. Students were requested to film the physical conditions of the neighbourhoods visited. Thus, the subjects of the documentary were the physical environment, the streets, drainage etc that reflect the lack in the community and not necessarily the residents.
2. Students were asked to interview residents only with their permission, after providing information about the purpose of the assignment. Where residents permitted, the interviews were to be recorded, but where they did not give permission for filming, students were requested to take notes on their jotters to be transcribed later.
3. The objective of the documentary was to enable students better to appreciate housing condition and so they were instructed not to publish their documentaries online so as not to expose residents who spoke with them to unintended consequences of participation.

It was during the in-class presentation of the documentary that the filmmaker co-author, who had recently filmed a documentary on affordable housing joined the class as an expert, to provide feedback on students'

work. His role was to provide professional advice on the quality, the sound effects and the editing style of each 'production' as a capacity building contribution. He engaged students on ethical considerations and shared his experience on gaining access to locations and obtaining permissions for subject participation. He also directed students towards newer technologies for documentary production. All these helped students to assess their own efforts and also to understand that the production of high quality documentary required much more elaboration than their own naïve production.

In answering the core question on which the assignment was based, for the communities Mabogunje classified as 'lower-medium grade residential districts', the students that visited Ebute Metta West, Ojuelegba and Obalende reported that Ebute-Metta West today still retained the characteristic that made it attractive to immigrants in the colonial period, which is accessibility to locations on the Lagos Island and Mainland. However, access to amenities such as water supply is still challenging and they showed clips of children queueing up for water at a public tap to evidence this. The major commercial activity is still street trading and they reported that the disorganised outlook of the area as described by Mabogunje is still very much evident. Changes in land uses from mainly residential to mixed commercial and residential was reported for Obalende and Ojuelegba, but both areas still retained their disorderly outlook so students decided they still retained a lower-medium grade classification. Ethnic diversity of residents in addition to similar changes from residential to commercial were also reported for the areas identified as lower grade residential districts (Idumabgo, Mushin and Somolu). Students reflected that Idumagbo and Mushin were deemed to be in even worse form than they were fifty years ago due to congestion, lack of drainage and proper waste management amongst others. The area visited in Somolu was Fola Agoro, and this is the only area that students reported could be said to have changed for the better and they attributed this to its proximity to the University of Lagos and other higher institutions in the area.

Three months after their documentary production, a survey was taken to assess students' perception of the assignment. This was the academic co-authors' first attempt at ascertaining the pedagogical value of the assignment. A short questionnaire was designed with a mix of thirteen open and close-ended questions. Participation was voluntary and anonymous to protect against bias and to encourage students to freely express themselves. Seventy-two out of the ninety-nine students that offered the course took part in the survey. We provide summaries of their feedback on the impact made in [Table 1](#).

From a standpoint of academics seeking to provide better and more practical understanding of housing problems to students, we are of the

**Table 1.** Students' perception of impact of documentary assignment.

Areas of Impact	Illustrative Quotes
Improved learning outcomes	<i>'because documentary, graphical rep could easily be remembered than mere class teaching'</i> <i>'It is a different way of learning, where there is less pressure and a platform for students to self-express themselves. It made learning more dynamic for me.'</i> <i>'It is a lot easier to understand the issues when you are right there in the heart of it all'.</i>
Skills acquisition	<i>'It assisted me in discovering free good applications and software for making good documentaries'.</i> <i>'I learnt videography skills'</i>
Appreciation of depth of housing problems in Lagos	<i>'The housing problems are a lot more than I thought,'</i> <i>'I discovered over-crowding is a major problem in Lagos State housing.'</i> <i>'Lagos still has a relatively long way to go to address (its) housing issues'</i>
Appreciation of depth of housing problems in communities visited	<i>'It gave an idea to how people live in Mushin'</i> <i>'It gave in-depth knowledge of the challenges currently being faced by communities and approaches to solving their problems'</i> <i>'An eye opener'.</i> <i>'The interaction with residents of the community made me see things from their perspective'</i> <i>'A lot of people are homeless'</i> <i>'... Made me have the knowledge that some areas still suffer underdevelopment'</i>

opinion that the process has been beneficial for them. We found that more students placed value on the non-academic impact of the exercise, as 83% responded that the assignment was useful to them outside of grading and academic requirements of learning while 63% indicated that they had sufficient knowledge of housing problems from in-class teaching. This is an indication of the potential this mode of teaching has for producing non-academic but beneficial experiences for students. While also collaborating Bing Chen's (Chen, 2015) observation (though with particular reference to research-led teaching) that non-conventional pedagogies should not be taken for granted as an indicator of quality teaching. Students reported they had learnt additional videography skills and are willing to apply this method if any opportunity for such arises. They also reported having a clearer view of the magnitude of the housing problems in Lagos and also of the communities they visited. As one student remarked: *'Seeing is believing. Hence I was able to understand better'.*

However, there are two limitations that are observable. First, our report of impact is limited by lack of testing students' expectations before and after the documentary assignment. We also did not set out to test any pedagogical theories, even though we found that our methods provide

some evidence for the adoption of social constructivism pedagogy and methods. These are weaknesses which we hope to subsequently address in later activities and that should also be considered by academics who consider these methods relevant to their context.

While the academic co-authors had been working with students in self-produced visual learning, the film-maker co-author, a Nollywood producer, had been working on a documentary titled 'Kelechi's Quest', as a tool to influence discourse and policy change in the Lagos Housing sector. This is discussed in the next section.

### **What role can academia play in documentary production to enable research communication to the policy sector? Example of Kelechi's Quest**

The rationale for documentary production as an agent of policy change is to promote social issues. Kelechi's Quest (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gAQ52UDbN6A>) is an example of a documentary featuring the difficulties of finding affordable but decent housing in the Lagos housing market. The documentary series was developed as an alternative means of disseminating research on housing affordability carried out by the Heinrich Boll Foundation as part of its housing advocacy and policy engagement activity in Lagos. As the effort produced a large volume of academic material, it was desired that the research outcome be presented in a way that is accessible to general audiences including communities and governments which would also elicit prompt actions. The film-maker co-author was contracted to produce the documentary as a series of 'soft', personal narratives to capture the experiences of persons seeking affordable housing in the city. Kelechi Udegbe, a well-known Nollywood actor playing a comic character in the web series 'Officer Titus' was also enlisted as narrator. The choice of Kelechi was influenced by the need to lighten the documentary and to draw the attention of a wider audience to the very serious housing problem in Lagos.

Thus, Kelechi's Quest fits loosely into the docudrama category. During the pre-production stage, Heinrich Boll's Urban Challenges research report was condensed into a six-episode documentary series of duration 7–10 minutes. The series interrogated the scale of the housing challenges in Lagos and how it can be addressed. In the production of the documentary, there was an intentional move to use a fluid, mobile background such that 90% of the scenes were outdoors, with Kelechi interviewing everyday people on the streets. There were slight modifications to content to enable expansion of discourse when necessary. Scripting and the creation of story boards gave further ideas about the types of shots required, the types of

backgrounds to be used, and the putting together of a cast for the project. The crew covered Lagos in five days, with Kelechi carrying out interviews on the perception of everyday people and professionals to housing affordability challenge in the city. Additional scripting was done after the shoots to strengthen areas not covered and this was produced as voice-overs. An ethical issue arose when it was observed during filming that one of the professionals was uncomfortable about providing in-depth information on the ineffective nature of the government's housing projects. In order to ensure that his right to not speak was protected, and also in view of the need to project the real situation, it was decided that Kelechi highlight that information (as obtained from other secondary sources) as a voice-over.

The public presentation and review of Kelechi's *Quest* took place in Lagos on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2018 with six panellists from academia, government, human rights, media, civil societies, community groups and the private sector. One of the academic co-authors represented academia in this event and this was where the paths of the authors crossed, thus paving way for the idea of the film-maker co-author's own meeting with the students. The academic co-author was invited to assess the efficacy of the documentary's findings. Episode after episode was aired and she reviewed the evidence base and accuracy of assertions from her research background, and also called attention to land accessibility as an area that needs to be emphasised to ensure housing affordability, as well as the establishment of demographics around housing needs in Lagos. Thus, the contribution of the academic co-authors to Kelechi's *Quest* was to provide a critical appraisal based on theory and research experience to validate the documentary series. This was a useful exercise as the documentary was being prepared as a research outcome to policy makers with another private viewing and the evidence base had to be clear and validated. This method engages with removing barriers associated with the research-policy interface. We therefore promote this as an example of the role academics could play in the utilisation of documentaries as a research communication tool, apart from more direct engagement such as film makers or producers.

During an advocacy meeting led by Heinrich Boll, a private viewing presentation of Kelechi's *Quest* was made to the then Lagos State Commissioner of Housing and his team at the Ministry of Housing, which is the government department that oversees housing policy and implementation in the State. The private viewing accompanied the presentation of a previously prepared housing affordability report (see page 12) and other advocacy materials to the Ministry, with the meeting serving as the culmination of previous engagements between state and civil society. Subsequently, a Social Housing Committee was inaugurated by the Commissioner. The Committee was composed of members from the State

Ministry of Housing, civil society organisations, community leaders and housing officials. The Committee has since developed the Lagos State Housing Development Fund (which is now awaiting legislative approval) to improve affordable housing finance in Lagos. Thus, the documentary played a supporting role in the housing affordability advocacy drive.

The linkage between Kelechi's *Quest* and the students' documentaries is that both focus on housing problems as a social issue that required urgent government action, and both could also enhance the work of academics as researchers and as teachers respectively. Both offer avenues for academics to engage with documentary tools as an advocacy tool to (as Nichols put it) provide more understanding, empathy and insight, to grasp the implication and consequences of government actions. It is also remarkable that all three authors impacted the others' work at the review stage. The academic co-authors came in contact with the film maker at the 'post-production' stages to validate his work, and the filmmaker had the opportunity to appraise the students' work in the class presentation where he offered professional support and direction in documentary film making. This was exactly the type of direction the teaching of housing problems was expected to take in the classroom. However, it is appreciated that the impact of the collaboration might be better before the students were sent to field and it would have been more impactful to have an academic partner during the production of Kelechi's *Quest*.

## Discussion

In this paper, we have shown two examples about how academics have been involved as teachers and as researchers in documentary production. In the two examples we have presented, the point of convergence has been in achieving social policy objectives, specifically to draw attention to both qualitative and quantitative housing needs in Lagos as they perpetuate housing inequalities. For the self-produced documentary assignment, the aim was to activate what Nichols (2001) described as the 'social consciousness of the students, developing in them a passionate engagement with the pressing issues and concerns of the day'. The role of the academic co-authors in this was to facilitate the process of linking theoretical knowledge in class to an assigned field work, so that students observe, record the current situation of slum communities and invariably call into question the causal factors that have held these communities constant in their derelict state for over 50 years. Similarly, Kelechi's *Quest* sprang from the research work of an advocacy group seeking to communicate social problems in a more effective way to policy makers. One of the academic co-authors was involved as the academic reviewer of the documentary. For

both situations, because of the focus on the reality of government failure and its consequences in the lives of people, documentaries were found to be highly relevant and impactful.

For researcher-teachers trying to communicate the depth of housing deprivation in any city of the world to students from various socio-economic, and nationalities, and with varied life experiences, documentaries are still very relevant pedagogies to consider. This is especially true if the objective is to engage the topic of housing problems by encouraging students to transition from audience to co-producers of knowledge. This is in line with previous literature reviewed by Aktar & Oxley (2019), which identified student engagement as one of the important classroom dynamics in facilitating successful learning and one of the indicators that this approach works is the enthusiasm that students showed when they are exposed to real-life research works (Aktar & Oxley, 2019). The many benefits of incorporating practical research into higher education teaching has been documented as students are able to grasp how and why real life problems occur and how they can be solved. Documentaries provide a complementary but compelling visual narrative to this.

On our part, we identified the medium of documentaries as a step forward in capturing that practical real-life nexus of establishing the housing problems in each slum community visited, in articulating whether there had been changes in the descriptors used by Akin L. Mabogunje in 1960s to describe the state of the community and the present conditions today. On the other hand, our participation as academic reviewers for Kelechi Quest brought home the need for academics to also communicate with the policy sector through other avenues apart from our conventional research publications and policy briefs that they would probably not read. In Kelechi's Quest, the reawakening of social responsibility through the narration and the visualisation of real life, affordable home searching difficulties showed that documentaries are relevant as tools for research communication. The decision to serialise the documentary also reflects understanding of the need for brevity that is deemed suitable for the target audience.

However, there are concerns to be addressed. While the case of the student produced documentary was inspired by the desire to link theory to practice and to engender both academic and non-academic impact for learners, it is recognised that this is not an end in itself, so that students still need to engage in textual materials to have a strong grounding in the theoretical underpinning of the housing problems they were studying. On the other hand, the use of documentaries as a pedagogical tool cannot readily be spread across all courses in the built environment, especially when it requires deep interaction with people in their communities. This is because documentaries might compromise participants' privacy, breach



confidentiality and expose them to unintended negative actions. Therefore the ethics surrounding documentary production must be strictly adhered to. Student-produced documentaries in a multi-ethnic and diverse city such as Lagos, are also not without challenges as students reported difficulties with communicating with community members who spoke limited English. Where students desired to film interviews with residents, they encountered some resistance by a few who were not willing to give their consent to be recorded, in which case they proceeded with the interview by taking notes. Due to these ethical considerations, the students' production was not made public (online) since a consent was not sought from residents to do so during the production. They are rather used as assignment guides for other students and as learning aids in lower levels of undergraduate courses and for other academic purposes. This could potentially limit value for external audiences. For future work however, linking students up with community groups and 'gate-keepers' could improve interaction with community members while addressing substantive ethical considerations in documentary-making; pre-evaluations and post evaluations would be included so as to quantitatively ascertain the success of learning outcomes. Seeking funding to facilitate the training of students before the fieldtrip would also enhance the outputs.

Lessons learnt from Kelechi's Quest on the other hand, suggest that there is a need to produce even shorter documentaries for greater impact in policy circles. This is in consideration of the numerous other competing on-line visual engagement lasting for far shorter durations. The thread of the documentary however shows interest by foreign researchers. While this is quite positive, there are concerns about the willingness of policy makers to watch the entire series and then take some affirmative action. In these days of three second animations and one-minute social media clips, documentaries have to be packaged in such a way that they hold attention and communicate in short, effective bites. Otherwise, limited impact could be achieved. One suggestion for achieving this is to provide a short version of the documentary that is packaged to draw attention to core points accompanied by a link that invites viewers to watch the longer version. So just as 'trailers' summarise and bring out the 'action/core' scenes in a movie, and executive summaries bring out the core points in a report, 'short version' documentaries can be produced to accompany a longer version and could be potentially useful to enhance viewership by audiences in the policy sector and even the general public.

However, there are other competing media that call into question the value of documentaries in discourses on social problems, which we believe require some academic attention. The rise of social media apps such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, as well as networking apps on mobile

phones such as WhatsApp, which provide direct one-on-one and trackable access to policy makers and are also generally favoured by students is one area to consider. The ability to communicate research findings directly to policy makers and the opportunity for direct engagement certainly holds more attraction for modern research communication. It is also argued that even as young people have become increasingly involved in governance through increased access to social media and mobile apps (Williams-Elegbe, 2014), learning can be more readily transferred. However, the capacity of social media and mobile apps to catch users' attention through short, instant messaging now needs to be adopted in documentary production and dissemination. Otherwise, the use of documentaries in today's fast-paced world may become increasingly less relevant.

## Conclusion

The approach outlined in this paper is to show that documentaries are still relevant to discourses on housing and social policy and how academia can be involved in both.

We argue that the use of audio-visuals in both teaching and research is capable of reshaping the pedagogy of housing courses and hence can bring about impacts that go beyond grading and academic passes. A social constructivism approach to learning not only provides students with subject-based and transferable knowledge, but also develops lifelong and adaptive learning capabilities, all of which are necessary to foster critical independent thinking. The use of documentaries in engaging with the policy sector is also documented, as well as a possible role for academia and the opportunity to adapt this as an alternative research communication tool.

We can say that the documentary became the route through which we brought housing problems closer to our audiences in our roles both as teachers and researcher-advocates. In our roles as teachers, we are able to develop a helpful pedagogical approach for motivating students to engage with housing problems outside of the classroom, to progress in their careers and education, if possible, as social advocates and otherwise as proponents of urban sustainability as real estate surveyors and valuers. The documentary thus played a role in building on latent creative skills in students, complemented the classroom teaching and brought the key-text into a real life experience that the students were able to effectively capture. Having also received professional feedback on their work, it is hoped that the tasks built research confidence in students especially with regard to primary data collection and neighbourhood level research.

We recognise that there are indeed other ways that housing problems can be taught in class and there are also other ways that academia can be involved in documentary production, eg as social actors, as co-producers and financiers, with funds raised from grants. What is important is that academics are able to transform from their roles as teachers or as researchers, to explore other non-printed traditional communication routes so as to engage with the public and their students better. This means academics must be able to use appropriate tools to navigate the research-policy interface, to collaborate with non-academics to bring about changes in the policy space and also be capable of reviewing their teaching pedagogies to enable students to experience the relevance of old and new media. Other academics in the built environment and housing policy space are invited to explore the use of media like documentaries in strengthening the nexus between research, teaching and policy engagement.

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