

An Urban Planning Revolution in Difficult Times: The Impact of Large Housing Projects in Lagos

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Despite the trillions of dollars disbursed on housing globally, investments towards social housing (SH) specifically continue to decline. SH developments, which provide upwards of 1,000 units per development, are today considered to be one viable answer to housing deficits. In Lagos, Nigeria, nothing short of a revolution is needed to resolve its pressing housing and urban planning challenges. This timely investigation highlights limitations with the changing scale of SH developments, and explores current provisions for SH within master planning documents, among other things. Offering innovative solutions to a challenge of global proportions is hugely beneficial and undeniably urgent.

Keywords: social housing, urban planning, large housing projects

INTRODUCTION

FIGURE 1
SEAC PAI VAN PUBLIC HOUSING QUARTERS (MACAU), SOCIAL HOUSING CAROUGE (SWITZERLAND), PUBLIC HOUSING (HONG KONG)



FIGURE 2
SEAC PAI VAN PUBLIC HOUSING QUARTERS (MACAU), SOCIAL HOUSING CAROUGE (SWITZERLAND), PUBLIC HOUSING (HONG KONG)



FIGURE 3
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BACKGROUND

Origin, History and Cultural Perceptions of Social Housing in Nigeria

The concept of social housing (SH) is believed to have been initiated in Europe and, over the years, as it has spread across the globe and taken on many forms, its connotation has evolved (OECD, 2016). For example, and consequently, “each country has forms of housing that are broadly designed to satisfy the needs of households who are unable to compete in the marketplace for housing of an acceptable standard” (Oxley, 2009, p. 2). In Nigeria, according to the 2011 National Housing Policy (NHP), the government defines SH as “housing for no income earners, low-income earners and lower medium income earners” (Ekong & Onye, 2013, p. 257), where these three classes refer to “all persons whose income does not exceed the national average of 25% of the National Minimum wage; all persons whose annual income exceeds the ‘No Income’ level, but does not exceed the National Minimum wage; and all persons whose annual income exceeds the National Minimum wage, but does not exceed four times the National Minimum wage” (Ekong & Onye, 2013, p. 258) respectively.

Nigerian SH is designed after Western style approaches (Ukoha & Beamish, 1996), and was acknowledged as a fundamental housing development in the 1970s (Onyike, 2012). Contextually, SH covers a variety of tenures including: social rented/rental housing, low-cost housing, co-operatives, private-rented social housing, and shared ownership housing; among which low-cost housing is the most popular (Olotuah & Aiyetan, 2006; Ndubueze, 2009). The responsibility of providing SH and tackling SH issues (e.g., supply, quality, affordability, inadequate services, etc.) were initially in the Nigerian governments’ hands, that is until the late 1990s when the government accepted the realization of its inability to match the need in quantity (as well as quality). This deficiency is seen, statistically, with the government having provided only between 30,000 and 40,000 units nationwide over the 40-year period between 1973 and 2013 - 14,792 of which were provided in the latter 17 years (Omolabi & Adebayo, 2017). The Nigerian government eventually created and implemented several initiatives allowing Public-Private Partnerships

(PPP), where private developers participated in housing production and provision (Isah, 2016). While such partnerships did not meet the burgeoning demand, there was an improvement witnessed in the nation's production rate, hence the conversion of the PPP initiative into policy; specifically, PPP Housing Development policy (Daramola, 2006; Isah, 2016). This policy triggered cooperative relationships between the government and private developers – an intervention the government anticipated would (better) serve housing needs of the entire population; and especially the poor (Daramola, 2006). With this arrangement/agreement, the government assumed less responsibility with actual delivery of SH and concentrated instead on policy formulation, provision of land, and assurances of availability of cheap and long-term funding (for individuals and developers who participate in housing provision) (Ndubueze, 2009, p. 54).

Defining the Problem

Why Is There a Decline in Large-Scale Social Housing Projects in (Lagos) Nigeria?

Access to housing has been long acknowledged as integral to life and livelihood. Provision of shelter is a basic human right. While housing is a basic necessity, at its epicenter is social housing (SH). SH is comparable to infrastructure such as roads and rail, in its criticality (Pradolin, 2016). When the necessity of SH was identified in Nigeria and its construction commenced, it mirrored the US' strategy of utilizing large-scale (LS) housing projects. While this strategy began in the US in the thirties, it was not until the fifties before it garnered sufficient acceptance and subsequently, provoked an upsurge of SH production. By the early seventies, over 1 million units had been produced and delivered (Fischer, 2014). While SH was hugely beneficial "there were problems right from the start" (Fischer, 2014, para. 5) thus, by the sixties, when LSSH was still gaining momentum, "something changed" (ibid.). The change, which was instrumental in severely decelerating the progress of SH, was an aggregate of several elements that worsened over time. Location of projects [excessively situated in poor (black) neighborhoods], constrained construction costs (which resulted in maintenance challenges), and the firm requirement that SH would accommodate only the deprived (eliminated the rent-paying lower income classes and created an increasingly dense, disorderly and problematic community) are a few successive unfavorable decisions that were contributory to social dysfunction of US LSSH. By the seventies/eighties, LSSH projects had an unpleasant reputation (ibid. para. 9). The case of Puitt-Igoe in St. Louis, Missouri, including its implosion not far from its creation, proved emblematic of the flawed logic underpinning LSSH.

Between the eighties and late nineties (and continuing to the present), in a bid to lessen negative perceptions surrounding SH while sustaining its spread, many countries resorted to a compromise – constructing developments containing (just over) fifty units in a scattered, low-density building strategy (NYU Furman Center, 2020). The turn of the twenty first century however, ushered in – again – the employment of LS housing projects (in their original form – over 1,000 units) specifically within emerging and developing countries (Buckley et al., 2016). This reinstatement of LSSH was predicated on refinement of past planning policies and interventions, and an understanding of the main issues confronting decision-makers at all levels regarding urban expansion and solutions to effectively address it (Buckley et al., 2016). Research determined that cities would not only require a substantial increase in the number of SH dwellings but also needed to *prioritize* LS housing developments as a practical path forward (Gowan & Cooper, 2018). Rather than focus on the negative, for which certain adjustments have been made (e.g., design, quality, suitability to existing community, etc.), the dire SH supply-demand gap forced governments to focus on recognized hugely positive characteristics attached to LSSHs such as: being less expensive to construct, cheaper overall operating costs (for management, maintenance, and administration), and larger delivery/supply per time.

In 2019, the Nigerian government disclosed plans to increase amounts of housing units provided per annum from 100,000 to 1 million (Premium Times, 2019). Over 90% of the current 100,000 however (produced by private developers) is dedicated to housing for high-income/luxury market segments, and to an extent, the middle class while SH makes up a maximum of 5% (Olotuah & Aiyetan, 2006). The provision of 5,000 SH units in Nigeria, with a population in excess of 205 million (World Population Review, 2020), a 22 million housing deficit (Akeredolu, 2019), and a national average poverty rate of almost 65%, which

is on the rise (UN, 2015), proves unable to address the need. Having established this gap, we see that: (I) the most fruitful years for SH in Nigeria was the period when LSSH was supported, (II) housing need has worsened, (III) current production rate is inadequate, (IV) significant amount of the issues associated with LSSH have potential successful treatments, and, (V) LSSH has been identified as the ideal solution for the housing crisis.

A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

“We have tried many housing delivery strategies in the past few years with a number of useful lessons, but they have been unsuccessful and we continue to work towards ensuring that housing agencies... specialize in housing delivery strategy.” - Permanent Secretary of Ogun State Ministry of Housing, Nigeria.

Fueled by the oil-boom, growing housing need in the seventies, and the first civilian administration keen on a revolutionary approach, the Nigerian government adopted use of LSSH. Before then (1951-1972), only 7,000 SH units had been produced in Nigeria -- although adopting LSSH had modest impact in reducing the housing need, it was a historic effort for housing provision in Nigeria. LSSH was fraught with several challenges: lack of amenities, high cost of (largely imported) building materials, poor management and maintenance, etc. (Ilesanmi, 2010). Despite challenges, it was the government’s intention to maintain LSSH programs. In the late eighties & early nineties, an examination of programs implemented at the time, revealed that while these programs were “planned towards meeting the needs of the poor/low-income groups, they were – in many cases – taken over by higher-income groups” (Ilesanmi, 2010, p. 8), and/or displaced by other policy goals considered to be of greater importance. The aggregate of the above-mentioned discoveries alongside the inconsistencies in the “institutional mechanisms of decision making and implementation processes” (p. 8) are seen to be responsible for the eventual collapse of LSSH policy in Nigeria. The change from small-scale SH (1950s to early 1970s), to LSSH, to small-scale again (1990s to 2010s) is testament to a “lack of continuity in housing policies and programs” (p. 434), and uncertainty as to the most suitable SH delivery strategy for the country (Ibem et al., 2010).

In addition to unmet housing needs, implications of variation in the scale of SH points to an inability of the government or applicable authorities to appropriately observe and appraise performance of past policies, programs and strategies (Ibem et al., 2010). Furthermore, besides the issue of instability with the policy and programs, there are those related to the efficacy of master planning (MP) and the failure to modify and implement new housing policies (indicated within these MPs) that equally need to be contemplated and confronted.

If ‘Master Planning’ Is to Be the Predictive Metric, How Does This Development Modality Mesh With the Nation’s Broader History?

Like many developing countries, particularly in Africa, Nigeria has a fragile master plan (Nicholas, 2018). A master plan (MP), expected to provide futuristic direction (e.g., analysis, recommendations, and proposals) towards the “growth and development of a nation’s population, economy, housing, transportation, community facilities and land use” (World Bank, 2015), is typically disregarded in this context. The Nigerian MP comprises western planning ideologies with no road map as to how it would improve its context -- this shortcoming is reflected in the MP’s inability to manage inevitable change in the elements that MPs are particularly created to confront. Specifically, as pertains the present paper, is neglect of housing. According to Fatusin (2013), while housing is the most investigated sector, and a major component of physical master planning in Nigeria, it is the least equitable. The MP housing policies are only partially considered, and incorporate no clear implementation plan (Nicholas, 2018). Focus on housing in the MP is on “housing finance... and the creation of a land management system to stimulate rapid and broad-scale housing construction” [Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2015, p. 75] while overlooking specification of definite requirements for the distinct housing types. It is only during the period of the National Development Plans (NDP)(1970s-1990s) when the government specified percentage of housing

provision dedicated to the different income groups, namely, 60%, 25%, and 15% to low-income, middle-income, and high-income groups respectively (Olayiwola et al., 2005). Other than this, there has been no mention of current and projected housing deficits by type based on the anticipated/projected population increase. Obscurity in the national MP is evident in subsumed MPs for various states in Nigeria.

Kigali, Rwanda is a completely dissimilar scenario. Nicholas (2018) refers to the Kigali MP as realistic, transparent, ambitious but achievable, and as having a clear vision and implementation plan. The ten-year (2012-2022) housing market study estimates a deficit of just over 450,000 units, of which about 344,000 are to be newly constructed with the difference, that is old housing, to be refurbished. Within 344,000 units, the government highlighted specific housing types it intended to provide as well as an accompanying amount. They targeted 43,436 units as SH (12.6% of the estimates total), 186,163 units for affordable housing (54.1%), 112,867 units for mid-range housing (32.8%), and 1,601 units for premium housing (0.5%) [Ministry of Infrastructure (MININFRA), 2020]. Additionally, in the Kigali MP, the government identifies sites around the city where SH development should be located. For example, recent SH developments have been located away from informal settlements, and low-income neighborhoods such as the 250 units, which are located in Batsinda; a less dense, controlled area in Kigali. Production in Kigali may not meet ambitious LSSH numbers of over 1,000 units but current rates of delivery are a huge improvement from the fifty units per project that have become commonplace.

Over the last two decades, the Kigali government has revised the MP a handful of times [2003, 2008 (conceptual MP), 2013, 2018 (review), and 2019 (interim plan towards 2050)], and every time, upon extensive improvement, a “vision project” was generated. The Rwandan government initiated these formal “vision projects” (VPs) as a means of advancing new ideas built upon modification of previous MP policies/plans. This model of continuous assessment and improvement is significant. Parallel to these modifications were administration plans for effecting change. Thus far, these VPs have been instrumental in ridding city centers of informal settlements and relocating the disadvantaged to more economically desirable parts of Kigali via strategic siting decisions (Benken, 2017). This strategy stands in stark contrast from approaches assumed in Nigeria. There is a severe lack of novel master planning in Nigeria and a recurrent assessment of existing ones; such that many governments are unaware of the existence of a MP for their territories (Lamond et al., 2015). Nigeria has been criticized for lack of flexibility & coherence in its planning and policy-making hence the successive rollout of plans and programs: four 5-year development plans, one structural adjustment program, two 3-year and several annual rolling plans, and four visions and strategies (including growth and development plans) (Iheanacho, 2014; Emmanuel, 2019). With the exception of these national interventions, there is little to no record of plans/programs tailored specifically to Lagos. In fact, the singular document with semblance to a MP for Lagos is the Lagos State Development Plan 2012-2025. With less than 5 years outstanding on the plan, there is yet to be a revision. That said, the authors of the present paper argue that MPs in our modern times need to be dynamic, responsive and able to adapt to shifting circumstances.

SPECULATIONS FOR TOMORROW

“Urban expansion is happening and the choice for Nigerian policy makers is whether it will continue to be piecemeal, or will greater efforts be made to expand strategically and cohesively” – Lamond et al. (2015, p. 19)

Riding on the study of the Kigali case, there are lessons to be learned. The Kigali approach constitutes a premise for a revolution in the way issues are currently confronted and conducted in (Lagos) Nigeria. Similar to the SH concept, which has been reimagined and recreated from country to country despite US origins, the authors are not advocating compulsory duplication but the realization that their estimation of the solution proposed for Lagos is indeed plausible.

In Kigali, as in many cities within and outside the developing region, LSSH is proving a compelling answer. In the past decade, cities have begun to reinstate LSSH while discontinuing the trend of relegating these developments to fringe neighborhoods based on growing evidence supporting the often deplorable

outcomes of this approach (Florida, 2017). Following change in siting, “strategic spatial planning for long-term development objectives” (ibid. p. 19) need to be integrated into the MP. In order to execute this objective, the Nigerian government needs to deploy a multi-pronged effort. First, they must design MPs that are flexible so that they adapt to varying urban planning situations. Second, the government must normalize ‘rapid urban profiling’, which refers to the continuous review of MPs for responsiveness, with the objective to identify unsuitable aspects and potential elements of improvement to be discarded and included respectively (Lamond et al., 2015). Regular review will provide a realistic plan for the city based on current conditions and forms a solid basis for the understanding required to make *room* in cities to accommodate population growth and LSSH. Introduction of LSSH into neighborhoods predominantly occupied by private dwellings is able to create vibrancy in architecture and acceptance among the public (Ilesanmi, 2010). Options exist to either demolish/eradicate areas of informality in city centers or select less expensive land in the city for new LSSH construction. As in Kigali, the goal is to eventually make provisions for LSSH in choice locations within the MP.

As in Kigali and in alignment with the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2019) study, proper siting of LSSH in choice neighborhoods was determined to eliminate issues with lack of amenities and (in multiple scenarios,) it was observed that strategic siting was instrumental to improving both maintenance and management issues. This is supported by directives in policy that outline mandatory standards for pro-poor housing; these directives indicate needs to raise initial construction costs so that the building structure is sturdy enough to be ultimately less expensive, as it will require significantly less maintenance-related costs (Murray & Halusan, 2017). Additional elements in the policy demand that SRH dwellings meet specific standards; implications being that alongside improving the construction, materials and design overall, plans are made to address maintenance of appearance of the development (interior and exterior), the surrounding yard, maintenance of elements vital for health, safety, occupant and neighborhood resident welfare, plus welfare of neighbourhood amenity (Buckley & Bajpai, 2015).

Recognition of a vacuum (that is, halted use of LSSH and need to incorporate LSSH into the MP) in Nigeria and design of policy to address it are two lesser evils in a 3-part problem, the third aspect being implementation and governance. The solution applied in the Kigali case emphasized representation of all societal levels in policy-making processes (Benken, 2017). In Nigeria, meaningful representation of all societal levels in policy-making, implementation and governance processes proves particularly critical because (local) planning personnel, institutions, and authorities are currently weak and therefore, require top-level influence for enforcement (Yahaya & Ishiak, 2013). The essence of this tactic is to improve development accountability such that, rather than assume that the lowest societal levels/less powerful will benefit from the LSSH, actions were appropriated towards its assurance. One action that has been previously implemented towards improved governance in planning is the Good Urban Governance (GUG) initiative launched by UN-Habitat in collaboration with the Nigerian government -- with a focus on “effectiveness, equity, participation, security, and accountability” (Lamond et al., 2015, p. 19). Despite being lauded, the absence of a clear MP rendered its effort futile, resulting in discontinuation. Given a clear revised MP indicating new choice locations where LSSH could be situated, suggestions on governing implementation of the MP adaptations, the concern of supporting this endeavor, in a financial capacity, remains.

Through the history of unsuccessful urban development plans in Nigeria, the lack of financial resources has never been chief among reasons for their failure (Ayedun & Oluwatobi, 2011). Lack of political will and government commitment, and “inadequate knowledge of the nature, scope, and dimension of the country’s housing problem” have commonly taken precedence (Ayedun & Oluwatobi, 2011; Bello, 2019). The latter ties in firmly to the former in the sense that one demotivator that contributes to precipitating the lack of political will is insufficient information afforded government upon which to base decisions to ratify policy. Other causative elements attributed to the lack of political will include: (I) implementation mechanisms: these are typically found to be lacking details for operationalization (Bolaji et al., 2015), (II) (political) corruption; this is a persistent phenomenon in Nigeria that has been responsible for the widening gap between anticipated and actual output via misappropriation or looting of funds intended for national development (Fatile, 2012; Ukwuije, 2019). Corruption in Nigeria is so rife that it “has permeated every

policy” (Bolaji et al., 2015, p. 63), (III) divided bureaucratic/governmental motive is “manifested in multiple actors working according to their own interest, rather than collectively” (Bolaji et al., 2015, p. 62), and (IV) poor leadership and responsibility culture towards ensuring actualization of government decisions. These definitely must be addressed because as observed in many countries, institutional and political willpower are “absolutely necessary... in the implementation of public policy decisions” (Bolaji et al., 2015). On the occasion that finance-related issues are mentioned (as contributory to failure) it is with regard to governmental disinterest in disbursing more funds than necessary, evidenced in a lack of rebate with importation of building materials, corruption and overpricing of contracts around housing development projects, and a “high profit driven attitude among developers” (Ayedun & Oluwatobi, 2011, p. 3). According to Ilesanmi (2010), to address the housing deficit, Nigeria needs both a large and continuous pool of funds in order to achieve housing targets and overcome associated financial challenges. To this effect, every year, annual housing budget allocations have increased and presently stands as the top recipient of government funding. The estimated budget for the Ministry of Works and Housing for 2020 is slated at USD26.6 billion (based on May 15th conversion of NGN10.3 trillion at a rate of NGN387 to USD1) (Adams, 2019). The World Bank (2016) estimated that Nigeria requires 720,000 housing units annually, at a corresponding total cost of USD 60 billion (Andrew & Akolisa, 2019). Based on simple extrapolation, if one-half of the annual budget of USD13.2 billion is committed to the housing sector, the portion that this figure covers comes to about 156,000 units. With a current annual housing target of 100,000 units, which is hardly met, the guarantee of base minimum annual production of 156,000 units would set the country well on its way to alleviating the housing crisis. Also, considering that the housing budget allocation has increased significantly on an annual basis, the possibility this will continue, thus increasing the rate of production, exists. It is worth considering that if housing is already seen as the most critical of sectors by its allocation in the national budget, that it should receive equal attention when the MP is being compiled – *particularly with respect to SH.*

In conclusion, the present paper, which stands as both critique and call to arms, investigates the importance of LSSH in city neighborhoods and makes a case for reinstatement of LSSH to tackle SH challenges in Lagos, Nigeria. The authors view LSSH as a viable path to meet pressing needs, noting that design and planning innovation, together with community-oriented decision-making, are key ingredients to success. The researchers suggest innovative approaches to review and modify the city’s MP, with the objective to integrate LSSH into choice locations in the city. LSSH must be seen as integral to the city’s fabric rather than outliers relegated to the margins. Lack of LSSH in absolute terms, and its current construction within fringe neighborhoods, has had perverse effects on the public as well as deleterious implications on various aspects of the economy. With this paper and upon our urging, we anticipate the Nigerian government will begin to reconsider the decision to maintain age-old practices across its cities. While LSSH has historically been cause for public opposition, new affordable design strategies and novel models for community building, can be applied to increase acceptance of such high-capacity high-impact developments within neighborhoods, thereby making it an appropriate tool to address critical demand. Armed with a robust budget and creative designs, a revolutionary strategy for LSSH in Nigeria is exactly what the nation needs.

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