

Residential Upgrading: An Element for Effective Housing Development and Delivery in Contemporary Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Successive regimes strove to implement new housing development schemes without refurbishing the existing substandard, and uninhabitable housing areas. The want of qualitative environment and systematized housing scheme will constitute the greatest threat to Nigeria as current economic downturn deepens. There is an urgent need to improve on Nigeria national housing policy. Qualitative housing and residential upgrading have been in the news for a long time, and should necessarily constitute an important element in effective housing development and delivery in Nigeria going forward. This paper draws immensely from the results of the community study programmes of the Departments of Architecture of Abia State University, Uturu, and Imo State University, Owerri. The discussion is intended to sensitize the public and private sector of Nigeria on the need for an improved shelter and environment in Nigeria.

Keywords: *uninhabitable housing areas; qualitative housing, improved shelter, residential upgrading*

1. INTRODUCTION

The results of past attempts by societies to solve the need for shelter, and the mismatch between past provision and present-day needs and wants, constitute the housing problem. This is shown in the publication of Moore (2019) on housing deficit in Nigeria. Until the late 1980's and early 1990's reconstructions of residential holdings in Nigerian urban and rural areas were not frequent. Land-Lords and home owners alike built their residences, and in subsequent years made little or no effort to maintain or upgrade the environment and the structures. The result was that after about twenty-five years, the tropical weather would have taken its toll on the building. Exposed foundations due to copious rainfall, rotten fascia boards, leaking roofs, concrete gutters infested by lichens and mosses, diagonal cracks on walls which are in turn covered by several layers of dust, completely or partially dilapidated service tanks and steps, water seeping from burst pipes and open sewers, electrical wires dangling dangerously here and there: all of these constitute the typical residential landscape in present day Nigeria. The status quo across the nation since 1975 was that past governments in an attempt to proffer solutions to ameliorate the housing problem, initiated housing programmes that focused essentially on new housing developments. This has however not delivered on the projections

as housing deficit has continued to exist. The existing deficit up to year 2019 is as adapted from Moore (2019) thus:

Table 1: Nigerians Housing Deficit (1991 - 2019)

Year	Housing Deficit (M)	Population (M)	Cause
1991 - 1993	4 - 7m	104m	Mortgage inefficiency
2007	8 - 10m	145m	Slum demolition and urban migration
2013 - 2015	16 - 17m	178m	Over population, urban expansion and increased poverty
2017 - 2019	18 - 22m	184m	Increased poverty, over population and urban migration

Source: Adapted from Money Morre (2019)

A place at Table 1 shows that with increasing population, there has been a steady rise in housing deficit. This indicates inability to match housing delivery to projected needs. Today annual inflation rate in Nigeria is at 16.95 percent. The consumer Price index, (CPI) increased by 15.63 percent in December 2021 (National Bureau of statistics, 2021). As galloping inflation in the cost of construction materials reinforced by bureaucratic bottlenecks continues to frustrate new residential developments across the country, the society continues to thirst fruitlessly for improvements in the residential landscape in terms of social and physical infrastructure. It is estimated that approximately N375 bn is required to bridge the country's housing deficit (Sgreci, 2020). This is extrapolating from the fixation of housing delivery as provision of brand new houses in new estates. An alternative plan of salvaging existing decrepit houses can cut down this cost drastically if the housing authorities accommodate this model.

Alarming population growth of urban centres due to accelerated birth rates and migration engender planless and ceaseless residential sprawl. These neighbourhoods house both the urban peasants and the young urban professionals who continue to aspire for "good living" in congenial dwellings. It is against the aforesaid background that it is proposed that the housing policy trust of the nation concentrates on adding to the housing stock, and upgrading the existing housing areas of the country.

2. SIGNALS NECESSITATING UPGRADING

When should a residential area qualify for upgrading, and what should be upgraded? Different schools of thought hold varying views on what should constitute the determinant signals for upgrading. This paper however, groups the signals into three as follows:

- (a) **Utilitarian Signals:** These determinants relate to the degree of functionality of the dwellings. Conditions and availability of requisite amenities like kitchen, drainage and sanitary facilities, cross ventilation in functional spaces, walkways, among others combine to make up the utilitarian determinants. Past studies indicate that age and over-use could accelerate the degree of deterioration of the afore stated elements.

- (b) **Safety Signals:** these factors relate to the structural and health conditions of the dwelling, including their context. Diagonal cracks, decayed roof components, leaking roofs, open refuse dumps, water seepage through burst pipes, and sanitary services tanks are some signals that indicate that the safety of residents are now questionable. In addition, impendence to traffic, dangerous intermixing of pedestrian and vehicular traffic within the residential context, and other subsurface conditions (erosion) could provide continued threat to human safety.
- (c) **Cosmetic signals:** these include both tangible and intangible elements that tend to reduce the aesthetic albeit appraised value of the residential neighbourhood. Included in this category are the following: cosmetic efflorescence on brick and concrete walls, layers of powdery dust, evidence of chalking and peeling paints, floors, roofs and walls infested by lichens and mosses, heavily overgrown shrubbery and other plant masses.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory of Sustainable Development is central to all effort at improving livelihoods which can also produce unintended consequence on diverse populations, production sectors and the environment. The theory advocates for development that can work; development that is not hurtful; development that is based on appropriate technology, development that maintains natural capital in use; development that factors intergenerational equity (WCED, 1987).

One challenge that has dogged development in developing countries is its vulnerability to elitism and elite designs. This is however not always sustainable. The idea that housing delivery as provided for by national budgets and in development plans has to be about fresh housing is one of the elitist constructs that fail to be in with the reality of the common man and that of the countries at large. The question is should Nigeria under a regime of economic crises, high inflation and unfavourable exchange rate stay on the model of fresh housing development as its major development paradigm? Or should the country go for the more appropriate technology of making improvement on existing decrepit housing stock which is not only cheaper in cost terms, but also more feasible?

4. DEVELOPING A CONCEPT FOR RESIDENTIAL UPGRADING

In order to evolve an effective residential upgrading concept, it is important to understand its essence. The role of residential upgrading is to intercede in the interest of humankind and to improve on the socio-economic well being of residents. It has been firmly established that a residential community should provide a congenial system for society's welfare and youth. This much has been documented in World Health organization (1988). Upgrading could create congenial environments for the society at large, by striving to amplify the livability of the area. It is important to observe that upgrading does not necessarily add to the existing housing stock. Rather, it tends to improve on the quality of the habitat. It could enhance the historic and cultural value of the community, by maximising the natural potentials as it minimises the negative aspects.

A survey of seven communities studied under the community studies programme of both Imo State University, Owerri and Abia State University, Uturu shows certain typological lessons that could be beneficial to an agency which hopes to embark on a residential upgrading scheme. The studies isolate seven factors that could be exploited to evolve an effective upgrading concept:

- a. Responsiveness to context and unity of purpose: This factor deals with the existing land use, emphasizing the structural pattern of the residential area. It aims at setting the basic policies for the upgrading scheme with a general goal of providing the best quality of environment for residents. The general relationship of the various areas should be reexamined, while such needs for preservation and enhancement of historical or culturally sensitive areas are assessed.

Further, the carrying capacity of the land could be measured and used to formulate the framework of the community structure. Areas requiring in-fill development are thus identified, and programmed into the scheme. Besides, adequate recognition is given the necessity of providing essential public services.

- (b) Safety: Protection of life and property should be one of the primary concerns of any residential upgrading scheme. Accessibility and circulation within the community have important implications on the socio-economic well being of residents. Furthermore, suitability of parking locations and resolution of pedestrian-vehicular conflicts would contribute meaningfully to the evolution of a good safety concept.

On the other hand, identification and appraisal of dangerous subsurface conditions including dilapidated service pits, eroded foundation walls and walkways, would help in formulating a good concept for safety. When in-fill development becomes necessary in upgrading, safety of residents could be enhanced by locating residential areas in functionally sympathetic areas that do not provide continued threat to residents.

- (c) Comfort and congenial environment: This factor though intangible, constitutes one of the major bedrocks for an effective residential upgrading proposals. Upgrading for optimum human comfort in our tropical condition could entail modification of indoor climate by opening up windows to ensure cross ventilation in usable spaces. Similarly, landscaping elements could be applied to achieve congenial environments for residents. Plant masses planted adjacent to buildings could provide shade for people, reduce glare and temperature, filter wind, deflect noise or even provide privacy.

- (d) Efficiency: This criterion in the context of this discussion refers to the ease with which the community structure can respond to the daily needs of the people. It could be measured by the degree of accessibility to critical utilities and other socio-physical infrastructural facilities in the community. An effective upgrading concept ensures that utilities and social services are reasonably accessible to all levels of residents.

- (e) **Imageability and spatial composition:** This concerns a conviction on the form and character that would be desired in the community. It is the way the upgraded community would be seen and understood by people. The nature of the visible form of the upgraded community could be distinct and symbolic in enhancing the phenomenon of defensible space (Newman, 1973). Moreover, an effective upgrading concept could reinforce the degree of continuity of familiar images and historical understanding of the community.
- (f) **Economics of upgrading and phasing:** Appropriateness and affordability of construction materials and technologies are very important issues in any construction project today. In addition, a consideration of phasing in the implementation could ensure the full realization of the design proposals.
- (g) **Promotion of Social Interaction:** Is there a pattern of grouping dwellings that is discernible? Such patterns could be reinforced in an effective upgrading concept by creating associations of mutual benefit. The concept may in addition, delineate paths of movement, define areas of activity for particular users, and help residents adopt proprietary attitude. This in turn decreases the crime vulnerability of a place.

5. RESIDENTIAL UPGRADING IMPLEMENTATION AND MANAGEMENT: RECOMMENDATIONS

Having examined the factors that are imperative in the evolution of an effective residential upgrading concept, it is also important that a systematic approach be adopted in elucidating actual implementation and management strategies. It is obvious that blighted residential areas result from neglect, and lack of the financial wherewithal to improve on the system. Considerable numbers of landlords, and home owners shy away from improvement programmes for their property because of lack of funds and a reluctance to impose higher rents on poor tenants.

Nigeria, having entered a period of economic crises, requires a positive action in the form of upgrading to improve on the qualitative component of our national housing stock. Direct and indirect instruments should be put in place to ensure successful implementation of the exercise. The direct instruments are those public investments such as site and services, land acquisition by a public body which exert impact directly on land improvement. Indirect action instruments are the policies and incentives which establish the framework for rules and systems for private and public upgrading as follows:

- (a) A new federal Government legislation should be designed and enacted incorporating residential upgrading as a policy, and with the intent of reducing property taxes on qualifying residential structures which have undergone rehabilitation. The purpose of the reduced tax rate is to provide economic incentive to landlords to improve their premises. This strategy will be a check on deterioration, and possible abandonment of old housing units which is harmful to the entire community. Further, personal contribution to upgrading as a rule should be reclaimable against tax.

- (b) An agency for the planning and implementation of the policy should be constituted, and made operational.
- (c) Associations of mutual benefit for implementation of upgrading proposals should be formed.
- (d) Incentives in the form of financial assistance by mortgage via Federal Government Legislation.
- (e) Upgrading could be in the form of social plans which would be prepared and discussed prior to implementation. This could be reinforced by Federal Government legislation.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper has made a case for residential upgrading to give a lease on life to residential communities across Nigeria. This advocacy is made against the backdrop of hardship occasioned by high inflationary rates, poor foreign exchange capacity, a devalued naira and unfavourable consumer price indices. At the personal level individuals have lost much capacity in delivering housing. At the corporate level the state has intense budget deficits, debt servicing taking a large chunk of the gross domestic product and haemorrhaging from corruption. These factors compromise the capacity of Federal Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, her state counterparts and subsidiary such as Federal Housing Authority to deliver housing and bridge the housing deficit put at 18 to 22 million by end of 2019. What is required is a revisiting of public policy that emphasizes fresh housing in housing delivery and projecting upgrade in the form of neighbourhood renewal scheme. This is the realistic option in the light of founding deficits and it aligns with the sustainable Development Goals.

However efforts will have to be made to forestall gentrification a situation in which upgrade takes housing away from the pricing range affordable by pre-upgrade occupants.

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