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Local building materials: affordable strategy for housing the Urban poor in Nigeria.

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Abstract

The rate of urbanization in Nigeria has witnessed tremendous increase in the last five decades. Census in the early Fifties showed that there were about 56 cities in the country and about 10.6 percent of the total population lived in these cities. This rose dramatically to 19.1 percent in 1963 and 24.5 percent in 1985. Today, the national population is estimated to be about 160 million with the urban population constituting about 60 percent. The phenomenal rise in population, number and size of our cities over the past few years have manifested in the acute shortage of dwelling units which resulted in overcrowding, high rents, poor urban living conditions, and low infrastructure services and indeed high crime rates. Various programs have been implemented to address housing problem. Despite all these interventions, Nigeria's housing problems still remain intractable. The paper recognizes that what Nigerians need to survive the wounds of near-homelessness include good governance, increased access to land, credit, affordable housing and environmentally sound and serviced human settlements. The paper examines the national housing need and housing provision, major constrain in delivery of low cost housing in Nigeria and conclude by recommending locally produced building materials and intermediate technology which can reduce construction cost by about 60 percent as an affordable strategy for construction of low cost housing in Nigeria.

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Keywords: Housing Need; Housing Provision; Housing Affordability.

1. Introduction.

Housing delivery is a highly contentious and politicised issue that is of great concern to administrators,

scholars and the public in Nigeria. In the last few decades, the influx of people into urban areas, the natural population increase and inadequate responses by the government have contributed to the worsening housing situation in the country, to the extent that economic development and the welfare of the citizens are adversely affected (1). These problems are more critical in the cities, where huge housing supply deficits, dilapidated housing conditions, high cost of housing as well as proliferation of slums and squatter settlements exist (2,3). As a result, a large majority of urban residents, particularly the low-income earners who constitute about 50 percent of Nigeria's 160 million people are forced to live in conditions that constitute an affront to human dignity (4).

In many developing countries, housing crisis is escalating unabated despite a number of new policies, programs and strategies being engaged in by public and private sectors in addressing this problem. The majority of those in need of housing in many less-developed nations in Africa, Asia and South America are in the low income cadre and some require special housing programs to be able to live in decent housing. Since market solutions and funds may not be suitable for housing this category of people and in view of the vital role housing plays in the socio-economic and political development of any nation; governments in these countries have over the years been engaged in public housing provision. In Nigeria however, from the debut efforts of the Lagos Executive Development Board (LEDB) in 1928 to date, public housing provision in this country has continued to lag behind the demand for housing, as almost 90 percent of the nation's housing stock is provided by the informal sector (5).

A number of challenges are militating against the provision of housing for the urban poor in Nigeria. These challenges include high rates of urbanization and population growth (6), absence of proper monitoring and evaluation of public housing policies and programs (1), lack of easy access to land and other housing inputs (5), cost of imported building materials (7) among others. As a result, public housing in Nigeria has been criticized for failing to generate tangible and sustainable housing production, distribution and acquisition mechanisms to meet increasing housing demand, particularly by low-income earners (8).

This paper focuses on the use of local building materials as an affordable strategy of housing the urban poor in Nigeria. The focus on urban area is based on the evidence that there is more severe housing problem in the urban areas than the rural areas both in their intensity and complexity.

2. Housing need in Nigeria.

Various governments in Nigeria have often expressed interest in housing provision for the masses. A review of past efforts indicates that the achievement level of the various national housing programmes was low. Rapid urban growth associated with accelerated tempo of socio-economic development has seriously aggravated the shortage of dwelling units, resulting in overcrowding, high rent, slum and squatter settlements which are visible features of urban centres throughout the country. Estimate and indicator of the magnitude of housing shortage vary. In summary, they all indicate massive shortages in total housing required. The total housing needs of the country in urban and rural areas were put to some 8 million units by the year 2000 by Federal Ministry of Works and Housing, and 12-14 million units in 2007 (9). A more recent estimate puts the figure even higher at 16-17 million units (10).

At an average cost of 2.5 million naira per housing unit, Nigeria will require 35 trillion Naira to fund the housing deficit of 14 million housing units (11). A recent study based on the salary structure of public servants in Nigeria showed that no public servant in Nigeria below salary grade level 13 in the federal civil service and salary grade level 16 in the Imo state civil service can afford a property costing ₦4.75m on a 25 years mortgage at 6 percent if he devotes 50 percent of his salary per annum to housing (11). At 18 percent mortgage rate, only a federal permanent secretary or his equivalent on grade level 17 can afford the same house. This shows that in the absence of some assistance and affordable strategies, adequate housing is unaffordable to most law abiding Nigerians.

3. Efforts by the government to confront urban homelessness

Table 1 shows the targeted and constructed number of housing units in the different public housing programs

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