The Experience with Post-Colonial Integrated Housing: A New Paradigm in the Provision of Shelter to the Poor

Sule, R. O., Prof. Dr., University of Calabar, Department of Geography and Regional Planning, PMB 1115, Calabar, Nigeria

Introduction

The Nigerian colonial experience has left behind vestiges of disharmony in the sheltering of the various segments of the community. In the colonial days, the Government Reservation Area, popularly known as GRA in Nigeria, was an exclusive area and a preservation for the expatriates and colonial British administrators. These areas in most large cities in Nigeria were deliberately enclosed by plantings to sever them from the indigenous residential areas. They are unique as they were characterised by planned streets, lighting, storm drains, green grasses, and other services such as plumbing and electricity. In fact, they used to be “heavens on earth” located within the unplanned, non-lit, poorly drained and wretchedly looking indigenous residential neighbourhood. Such separation may perhaps be explained on the basis of economic determinism or possible cultural preferences as O’Connor (1983) had argued but the assumption here may largely be predicated on social factor in which the indigenes were different in their entirety from the colonial administrators in terms of occupation, ethnicity, language etc. This explains why the administrators were concentrated in a clustering of high income, well defined social status and high quality housing districts.

The foregoing situation was not in any way limited to Nigeria. It was true of most African countries with colonial heritage. For example, Kay and Smout (1977) found that in 1970s Harare and Bulawayo remained rigidly segregated along racial boundaries. As at the time of reference Africans were disallowed from owning landed properties in most part of the city and were only permitted to live in the European housing districts if they were domestic servants.

The main purpose of this paper is to examine the recent attempts made to integrate the segregated enclaves within the residential districts of the Nigerian cities, using the Lagos example as a testing case. It must be noted that the level of segregation which started with the colonial history in housing had continued without abatement mainly because of economic factors, namely, type of employment, occupation, earning potentials and income per annum. The racial factor which was very dominant during the colonial days had ceased to be a determinant of “where to live” in virtually all the Nigerian cities.
Conceptual Context

Integrated housing is a relatively new phenomenon in a country where residential segregation is basically on economic lines. Given the circumstances that social status in the Nigerian society is both deterministic of the individual's income earning capacity and placement in the hierarchy of affluence, where you live in town is therefore a matter of how much respect you command. It must also be acknowledged here that in Nigeria unlike in Europe or North America, nobody frowns at how you make your money in terms of the need to discriminate against money gained through bribery, corruption or even burglary. In essence spatial differentiation in all the cities is a function of your capacity to make money in a genuine or dubious ways. This explains why the poor could not get themselves integrated into the medium and upper income housing exclusive sectors within the city.

In Haringey, Great Britain, the integrated project had been developed. It is known as "Folcus" in Sweden. In the United States of America, the purpose of this concept is primarily to facilitate the integration of the poorer black Americans and their white counterparts within the same physical or social milieu.

The concentration of the poor in low-income houses and perhaps in slums in recent times has increasingly been discovered to aggravate unsatisfactory housing and counter-productive. It is observed that the phenomenon of this nature has a mutual dragging-down effect on national development and which tends to magnify itself in an undesirable social consequence and also negative conditions inherent in and endemically associated with low-income housing areas. This is a fact benignly neglected by countries of the developing areas.

An analogy to integrated housing concept was provided by Hayworth (1980). He argued that in a given school all the students with poor grades in a particular age group were put in one class where the anticipation was that the teacher would be in a position to present his work in a special method that would enable all members of the class to understand and thereby progress effectively. The result was that the class never progressed at all. Instead, they tend to act as drags to each other so that learning progressed more slowly if indeed it ever progressed. This situation necessitated the dispersal of the class into small classes of better academic performance. The progress of slow-learners in almost all the cases, was exceptionally remarkable. This is the situation in integrated housing concept. The implementation must be a deliberate attempt to improve the lots of the poor masses in terms of housing. There is also a catalytic effect of this phenomenon on other social outlook of the poor.

Housing in Nigeria suggests a vicious cycle of poverty. The rich or medium-income live in enclaves, to the extent that the poor man's housing problems become obscured. Nobody of affluence passes through the concentrations to see things for himself, not even the planners. This is the core of the problem in most countries of the Third World.

The low-income groups live either in single storey low standard houses or two to three tenement blocks in crowded surroundings. The medium-income groups live in subsidised public housing, specifically designed to cater for their accommodation. In some other cases they live in privately rented houses, highly subsidised by as much as 40% of their income. The upper-income live in expensive houses, with spacious lots. The second and third groups include the top civil servants, administrators and business tycoons.

In Nigeria, like in other countries of the developing economies where a dwelling is associated with socio-economic status, drastic differences exist in size, design, location, internal and external facilities. Housing for the poor is thus segregated into a bunch of poorly constructed and unmaintained units. It is only the poor who come to live in such scheme.

There is a general conception of housing among the medium and upper income that the poor should live together. The upper or medium income think that they are saver to live separately. Argument of lowering property value or depreciation of property by noise, littering and undesirable behaviour by the poor had been put forward as rationale for such desire to segregate housing. A number of studies such as by Page and Warren (1970) revealed the resentment of the medium and upper income at the attempts made for housing integration between the rich and the poor.

Integration is a logical concept which in many cases are property of observable phenomena. As Sartori (1984) has argued it is a general concept which may be applied to a wide variety of such things as machines, living organisms and social systems. Specifically, the assumption is that no matter the level of differentiation it is possible to perceive a functional relationship among things or matters that are so different in their characteristics and properties. Rescher (1979) conceives of integration as an attempt for ordering a differentiated set of matters into a functional whole. It is unity in diversity. This is what gives rise to the concept and terminology of the system theory.

Empirical Analysis and Evidence

Two recent studies supervised by the author in Nigeria will be used to illustrate the attempt being made to experiment and operationalise the integrated housing concept. The first one is the Amuwo Odofin Housing Scheme in Lagos. This project was commissioned on November 14, 1981. Its initial conception was basically to provide shelter for the lower-income. It was heavily subsidized by the Government of Lagos State of Nigeria. As at 1990 a total sum of ₦289,850,681.00 had been spent to complete 19,756 low-cost housing units in the estate. Whereas only the sum of ₦86,066,301.00 was realised as contribution from the allottees. This amount represented 30.7% of the total government expenditure.