Towards the involvement of youths in housing provision in Nigeria

Adegun Olumuyiwa Bayode

MB Environment Initiative, P. O Box 1054, Ado Ekiti, Nigeria. E-mail: muyiwaadegun@yahoo.co.uk. Tel: +234 8067111910

Accepted 19 May 2008

Adequate and affordable housing and infrastructure is in short supply in Nigeria while marginal successes have been achieved from Governments’ various approaches at accelerating housing provision. From the realization of young people’s vast potentials, the possibility of their specific involvement in housing delivery is examined. It is enunciated that this approach would promote the spirit of service and patriotism in youths, provide profitable engagement against idleness, adduces towards entrepreneurship and self-reliance and would help at improving human capacity in the housing industry. A working relationship between the Government, non-governmental organization, communities and philanthropic gestures from individuals and organizations is envisaged. With appropriate commitment from all stakeholders, housing provision would be accelerated and the youths better prepared for the rest of life.

Key words: housing, youth development, non-governmental organizations

INTRODUCTION

Housing represents one of the basic human needs and has a plethora and profound impact on health, social interaction and general welfare of the individual and groups in any environment. Availability of decent and affordable housing has been inadequate in virtually all places and almost throughout history. This is more pronounced in developing countries where rapid rate of population growth and urbanization is unmatched by corresponding and commensurate change in social, economic and technological development. (Mabogunje et al., 1978).

In Nigeria a number of efforts have been mustered to solve the housing problem; from the most discernable and debut of the Lagos Executive Development Board (LEDB) in 1928 till now, a satisfactory respite have not been achieved. The achievement from the changing finance mechanisms, material and construction technology development, delivery mechanism etc over the years is minimal and therefore calls for deeper and wider thought towards means that is all-embracing, meets other societal needs yet accelerating the enormous task of housing the nation’s teeming population.

Youth development and housing provision

The youth represent a dynamic, vibrant, most talented sector of any society. It is the age of enlightenment, education, exposure (Ejigu, 2001); the generative power sets in at this period, (Vollman, 1985) hence he is conceived towards idealism and self discovery. Nduka (2008) noted that if this power is properly nurtured and exploited for positive purposes, he becomes heroic and set to conquer the world while on the other hand if left untapped and allowed to be channeled towards ignoble, impure purposes he becomes destructive. From the above catalytic properties, youth’s energy must therefore be properly directed and harnessed especially at solving problems: the nation’s challenges and evolving future civilization in it.

From a general perspective, Benson and Saito (2001) described youth development as a term that connotes a focus on supporting or promoting the positive development processes that are known or assumed to advance health and well-being. It is believed that such process does not only mean the traditional risk-reduction paradigm but also an approach that moves in direction of promoting core positive productive developmental opportunities and experience right from adolescence.

In Nigeria, young minds have moderately been key players in the various sectors including the housing Industry. However, the state of affairs however brings to fore more significant responsibilities and greater opportunities of involvement of the youth in housing develop-
ment. From a retrospective view, it is noteworthy that the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) which up till date remains the Federal government's major programme for Nigerian youths (albeit for only some with tertiary education) has made some achievement towards infrastructure development. A number of the corps members across the states imbued with the spirit of service and involved in personal and group community development service projects have made respectable improvement in physical infrastructure base of their host communities. This is however unspecific towards housing, the period of involvement is the scheme is relatively small and the percentage of Nigerian youths participating in the scheme is still limited.

The National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS) document also makes provision for policy thrust that targets youth empowerment. But this was limited to the use of public works and agricultural based schemes, entrepreneurship and vocational training which are all vague at frontally combating the germane issue of inadequate housing. It is also virtually devoid of any requisite robust framework for its extensive implementation. It is from this background that a comprehensive, self reliant and coherent approach is been sought to involve young people at facing the challenges in housing and by extension urban and regional development.

**Rationale for youth involvement in housing**

The rationale for involving the youth in housing is multi-pronged. First and of great demand in a nation like Nigeria is orientation towards the positive progressive values of selfless service, community responsibility, civic duty, patriotism and national pride. The pride from involvement in such community development service project should be a motivating factor for the youths towards active involvement in social housing cum infrastructural development in the community. These virtues once gained would definitely last for a lifetime and portends better future leadership in the nation.

The next side is a risk-reduction paradigm that seeks the reduction of obstacles to positive human development. Through profitable engagement in housing development process they are kept away from the streets and loitering, drugs, prostitution and abuse, neglect and negative peer or adult influence, violence and crime, since the old maxim still applies; 'the idle hand is the devil's workshop'. This also adduces towards entrepre-neurship and self reliance.

This intervention also helps to meet the short supply of skilled requisite manpower in the housing industry. The apprenticeship system is almost disbursed and the trade and vocational schools have been unsuccessful (Agboola, 2005), but this system would open up a silver bullet for manpower supply to the housing sector. This supply would in turn forestall any unnecessary rise in the already high cost of building houses. Building practitioners having been involved and provided hands-on-training and mentoring would create interest of the youth in the housing industry thus ensuring continuity, better performance and excellence particularly in skills like artisan, ornamentation and decoration, also construction management among others.

**Recommendable modalities for youth's participation in housing**

It is obvious from the foregoing that an effective involvement of youths in housing is desirable and also achievable. With an appropriate system in place and commitment made this could even yield much more than the desired result. Figure 1 shows a recommendable model for a productive involvement of the youth.

The principal facilitator or focal point envisaged for youth's participation in housing in Nigeria is the civil, youth based civil organizations. These are non-governmenal organizations or public-private partnership that have been involved or interested in holistic developmental programs for the youths particularly those of low and middle economic class. This is tandem with Agboola (1988)'s earlier optimism that a very bright future is possible when NGOs are sufficiently mobilized into the housing sector and in keeping with United Nation's Habitat II Conference, Istanbul of June 1996's opinion that civil society is the bedrock on which the global society rest, and must be looked to for support and leadership which are essential catalysts if any success would be made at implementing the Habitat agenda and redeeming the promises made at Istanbul (Warah, 1997).

They should possess strong staffing/collaborating position with aggregate experience in housing and infrastructural cum human development. The Organization determines the project to be embarked upon, its scope, amount of capital envisaged, sources of funding/sponsorship, the housing practitioners to be involved, the program schedule and a host of other decisions. It is also responsible for mobilization of youths to be involved in the project and sourcing for funds for it. Maintenance and other post-execution exigencies are to be well arranged for by the organization.

Volunteer and qualified personnel from the various skills and disciplines in the housing industry are to be seriously and selflessly involved as well. Architects, planners, builders, engineers, project managers, artisans among others in the industry are to train the young ones in the process and serve as mentors for them. Those who have once participated in the program can as well volunteer their services as trainers for the new ones. It is envisaged that projects through this approach should be simple yet impactful ones particularly urban upgrading, renewal schemes for city core, slums and squalar, landscaping and environmental beautification, low income housing especially provision for the homeless. The con-
The construction materials and technology involved should as well remain uncomplicated nevertheless meeting every required standard.

Communities remain a major stakeholder in this process. This is because local communities are in the best position to identify their needs and order their priorities. (Olotuah and Adesiji, 2005). In addition they possess valuable experience and a special understanding of their environment, their local building resources and the ways of making best uses of them. They are not just beneficiaries but are as well to be extensively involved in nomination, mobilization, and recruitment of the youths. They are also in the best place for monitoring and evaluation of such projects for feedback, strategic planning and effective execution in other places. Communities can as well independently operate local youths in housing programs to meet its peculiar needs and develop its young ones. Thus any shelter project that will be successful, sustainable and properly rooted in the cultural, climatic, socio-economic circumstances of the people should get the communities involved.

Finance remains one of the major pillars in shelter projects. The government through the capital finance strategy remains a principal source and leading light in financing projects like this. However, the traditional loan system, funds disbursement and management, mortgage and financial institutions activities, cost recovery mechanisms hitherto employed in previous public housing projects may not totally fit in here. A separate and special arrangement would be necessary since the goals in the two cases are not exactly the same. Furthermore, diverse non-governmental financial sources are possible and should be explored. Corporate organizations can fulfill their Corporate Social responsibility (CSR) through this means while national and international foundations can fund as well. Benefiting individuals groups or communities should be financially committed in whichever way it is determined.

The guiding principle is this approach is to be that of partnership. It is obvious at least in recent times that the government has failed and alone cannot bear the entire responsibility of providing housing, infrastructure and other basic services for the poor, hence the need for partnership that enables different sectors to gain access to each others’ skills and resources in other to maximize returns. Such synergy among the several players in the country; public, private, voluntary and community based organizations, non-governmental organizations and individuals particularly with the broad goal of youth cum housing development would definitely go a long way at
achieving the much sought after sustainable provision of adequate shelter and basic services for the populace.

Policy implication and recommendation

There is an overarching demand for housing provision in the country’s urban centers and government as policy maker has a major role to play if anything positive will happen. That is policies that would interest, induce, facilitate the civil, non-governmental, community and youth based organizations into housing delivery and otherwise to meet the broad, specialized and localized needs should emerge. The policy and institutional participatory structure of stakeholders at combating HIV/AIDS in the nation is enviable and instructive. The Federal Ministry of Housing and Urban Development and that of Youth Development needs to collaborate to spearhead this move, carrying along the various professional bodies in the housing industry. Countries with best practices for this paradigm exist and can be studied, emulated and certain ideas adapted for the Nigerian situation. This however must be done with strong commitment and without undue politicking.

There is need for proper attitudinal disposition and example from parents and guardians, community leaders and politicians, teachers and school authorities. As a matter of policy and principle overall youth development and empowerment must come *primum inter pares* in every strata of development planning. Young people should be encouraged at making a difference in the urban environment so that when the young has grown, and the old has died, the nation gets better.

Closing thoughts

This paper have brought to fore the potentials of the young people and attempting a peep into any erstwhile worthwhile involvement in housing and infrastructure development process. The enviable gains of such deliberate and specific effort are enunciated. A workable model and modality for this move is proposed. With more advocacy and strong commitment from all stakeholders, it is believed that the prevalent housing inadequacy in the nation would subside while the teeming young population is better equipped for the rest of life. This is a task that can be done and must be done.

REFERENCES


Warah R (1997) The Partnership Principle: Key to implementing the Habitat Agenda, *Habitat Debate* 3(1) p 1, 4-5