BARRIERS TO SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL HOUSING PROVISION

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Abstract

The failure of the market to meet people's housing needs has made Governments and non-profit organisations to intervene in the provision of adequate and affordable housing for the masses through social housing. Social housing is a form of housing provided by the governments and non-profit organisations using public and/or private funds for the benefit of every household, based on degree of need and made available at below market price with social service delivery motive on secured short or long tenure. However, social housing provision should be based on meeting the present needs adequately without compromising the rights of the future generations to meet their housing needs for it to be sustainable. The social service motive of sustainable social housing providers is besets with barriers causing affordability, accessibility, quantitative and qualitative issues. The main aim of this paper therefore, is to examine the barriers to the implementation of sustainable social housing provision with a view to proffering lasting solution for improvement. The paper adopts quantitative content analysis approach by reviewing relevant literature to determine the barriers to sustainable social housing provision. Findings have shown that social housing providers are handicapped by poor governance, perception and awareness, funding, planning and supply, skills and technology, safety and social mix as well as poor strategies. The paper postulates that education and awareness, good governance, good design and technology, maintenance culture and management, adequate funding, equity and beneficiaries' participation, environmental protection, supply and affordability, etc. are essential requirements for enhanced efficiency of sustainable social housing provision (SSHP).

Key words: **Sustainability, affordability, social housing, environmental, barriers, developers.**

INTRODUCTION

The desire to meet housing needs has been an enormous task for governments, private developers and non-profit organisations for many decades in different countries (National Shelter, 2012). Housing is of two categories: market and social housing (Drudy and Punch, 2002). While private individuals and organisations for profit making provide market housing, social/non-market housing is provided by governments and not-for-profit organisations for non-profit or social motives. Therefore, social housing can be described as "a form of housing provided by government/local authorities or non-profit organisations using public and/or private funds for the benefit of many household, based on degree of need, made available at below market price with the delivery of social service or not-for-profit motive on

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short or long term basis". Preference is given to social housing in this research because it is an intervention programme of governments and not-for-profit organisations which started from about the end of the First World War (Malpass and Victory, 2010). The reason for the intervention could be based on the desire to address the several issues associated with the market housing provision such as failure to adequately meet housing needs; the high cost of housing provision; non-affordability; inadequate standards; and poor funding (Stone 2003).

However, it seems that the several issues associated with the market housing provision have not been properly addressed through social housing provision to justify the intervention. The main reason for this could be that social housing provision is not sustainable in many countries. For instance, Powel (2010) argues that although Government's intervention in the form of social housing provision is important in order to: (i) make it available at affordable cost, (ii) increase the stock and (iii) improve the environment; the efforts so far have failed to yield the desired results due to sustainability issues. The literature evidence further shows that the desired result of social housing provision is inhibited by sustainability issues such as: affordability; availability; and funding; including high energy emission; use of non-environmental friendly materials; and poor social cohesion etc. (National Shelter, 2012). In addition, the social service motive of social housing providers is besets with the sustainability issues mentioned above. The need to properly address the sustainability issues of social housing provision is of great concern in this research.

This research therefore, is based on the need for social housing provision not only to adequately meet the present housing needs but also not to compromise the rights of the future generations to meet their housing needs. For this reason, social housing provision should be sustainable in order to achieve the objectives of its provision. However, despite the potential benefits of social housing provision, it has not become a sustainable project of governments in many countries due to enormous social, political and economic problems coupled with a significant expansion of the public services such as health, education, transportation, security, etc. (Abdullahi and Aziz, 2010). Even, where social housing provision has been embarked upon, such as the UK, Netherland, Australia and USA etc., the governments have started making a shift in their programmes against full funding of social housing provision due to the effects of the global financial crisis and social problems (Malpass and Victory, 2010; National Shelter, 2012). This study is not only identifying the barriers to sustainable social housing (SSHP), it also seeks to make suggestions which could address these barriers in order to properly meet housing needs. The study emanates from an ongoing PhD research work with the aim of developing a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) framework for the application and implementation of SSHP in the UK.

SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL HOUSING PROVISION (SSHP)

As aforementioned, social housing provision has an economic, environmental and social implication when critically examined from a life-cycle cost perspective. This is necessary as human beings, their shelter and the environment are inseparable components that support each other and should continue to do so from generation to generation (Pattinaja and Putuhena, 2010). For this reason, Girling (2010) argues that objectives of SSHP should be to: increase the gross density of development (compactness); provide for a broad cross-

section of people in each neighbourhood and increasing transportation options (diversity); mix residential areas with the commercial and civic, even business areas that serve them (completeness); and in some cases, allow for land-use-change over time (flexibility).

The general view on sustainability issue of the social housing provision is for it to properly bridge the gap between housing needs and supplies in terms of economic, environmental and social perspectives (Finmark, 2010). Pattinaja and Putuhena (2010) argue that it could be necessary for governments and private organisations to meet housing needs and avoid environmental degradation from generation to generation through SSHP. These arguments are in line with the Brundtland Report released by the United Nations in 1987, which defines sustainable development as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (Parkin, 2000). Various housing problems (environmental, economic and social) in many countries were the major issues that necessitated the global recognition of the concept of sustainable development. SSHP can therefore, be described as "housing that is made affordable by governments or non-profit organisations through various assisted programmes, built with environmental-friendly materials, have a long-term economic, environmental and social benefits without an increased life-cycle cost, and allowing the future generations to meet their housing needs".

METHODOLOGY

An analysis of the contents of published works was carried out to determine the barriers of SSHP. According to Elo and Kynga (2007), a 'content analysis' is a method that may be used with either qualitative or quantitative data and in an inductive or deductive way. It was used to condense the raw data from the chosen texts into a brief summary format. The criteria for the selection of documents are: quality of the content; currency; relevance; importance and types. A total of 53 published documents consisting of 5 conference papers, 11 journal papers, 11 books and other research papers, 24 government publications and 2 PhD theses were selected for this research paper. They are useful for this study on the basis of their wide subject areas of coverage; quality and measure of information; currency of information and bias in the areas of this research. The key words chosen for the selection of the documents are: constituents, barriers to implementation and suggestions for improvement in the SSHP. The internet search engines used to search for the key words are: Google; Google Scholar; IEEExplore; Web of Knowledge and Ebscohost. The websites consulted are those of governments (gov.); academic institutions (ac.); educational organisations (edu.) and private and public organisations (org.) that have a research focus and are interested in SSHP. Manual content analysis was carried out to analyse, code, group and rank the contents/findings of the aformentioned documents.

BARRIERS IN SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL HOUSING PROVISION (SSHP)

According to the findings emerged from the documents analysis, the barriers of SSHP are many. However, they can be grouped together and ranked as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Barriers of Sustainable Social Housing Provision (SSHP)

Items	Frequency – no. of citations	Ranking

Barriers			
	Governance	28	1
	Public Awareness	25	2
	Public Perception	25	2
	Funding	24	4
	Skills	21	5
	Technology	21	5
	Planning	13	7
	Supply	13	7
	Safety	7	9
	Social Cohesion	7	9
	Strategies	5	11

The above is discussed in detail in the following sub-sections.

Governance:

The issue of governance is in terms of the lack of proper housing policy, legal and institutional frameworks including poor determination of governments to deliver sustainable social housing that may adequately meet housing needs (Abidin, 2009). Zaid and Grham (2011) argued that poor governance may arise where a government lacks proper legal framework to encourage private investors for SSHP to meet housing needs. Literature evidence also shows that a key element of poor governance is the lack of appropriate institution with the capacity to coordinate activities of other public agencies, negotiate practicable terms with contractors and has no framework for assessing the level of compliance with sustainable measures (Kestermann, 2010). The problems arising from poor governance can lead to a failure in other areas hence it ranks first among other identified issues as shown in Table 1. Governance is a major issue that requires the need to take a decisive action for achieving the desired result in SSHP.

Public Awareness: An awareness of the long-term benefits of sustainable social housing is lacking in many countries possibly because it is a new concept (Ebsen and Rambol, 2000; Cooper and Jones, 2009). A lot of confusion may arise from the sketchy information on housing policies of governments for implementing SSHP (Abidin, 2009). This can constitute a major contributing factor to the hostility or resentment of the stakeholders, particularly at the grassroots level, towards sustainable housing programmes (Moskalyk, 2008).

Perception: In most cases, strict adherence to cultural values, traditional collective structures and consensus decision-making without due consideration for a change and innovation are impairing sustainable social housing development in many countries (Cooper and Jones, 2009). In addition, lack of community and political supports including poor stakeholders' attitudes have severally led to hostility or resentment towards sustainable policy (Dolata, 2008). Poor perception is an attribute of a lack of innovation and foresight. Due to passive culture, many developers and residents believe that sustainability is an academic pursuit and it is often discussed in the intellectual circle but seldom known outside leading to non-practice (Abidin, 2009).

Funding: This could be an issue, if a government fails to make adequate financial provision, for sustainable social housing delivery. This could also lead to an under investment in the social housing sector, and is one of the major factors that could cause a delay in project delivery and failed projects. A low revenue generation or poor economic condition can also lead to inadequate funding. Similarly, poor funding situation could arise, if a government fails to attract private sector funds from either local or international investment markets due to a lack of: credibility, strong economic policy, effective legal system, proper institutional framework and political stability.

Skills: There is lack of proper knowledge of sustainable techniques in the social housing sector in many countries. Pickvance (2009) argues that some public officials lack requisite skills in housing policy, physical planning and sustainable development. Many cases of equipment and structural failure in sustainable social housing projects are due to poor workmanship. Poor maintenance culture, wrong waste dumping sites and lack of proper skills for handling waste management facilities and recyclable equipment constitute the bane of SSHP in many countries (Gurran, 2003).

Technology: Evidence from the literature indicates a lack of proper technical tools to effectively construct and keep up SSHP in many countries. A high level of energy consumption in residential homes is suggesting a reliance on poor construction technologies which could also be a major contributing factor to carbon emissions and climate change being experienced in many parts of the world. A non-application of the right technologies is constraining the use of an alternative energy and recyclable materials in most sustainable social housing projects in many countries (Ebsen and Rambol, 2000).

Planning: Evidence gathered from the literature shows that land use and development-planning issues are contributing to the poor implementation of SSHP in many countries particularly developing nations. The rate of economic and social growth is not matching properly with that of SSHP, especially in terms of changes in the demographic and economic status, due to poor development plan and inefficient preparation to meet future housing needs (Winston, 2009). This is leading to a demand and supply crisis in sustainable social housing sector in many countries. A poor land use planning hinders adequate provision of public transport system and infrastructure in social housing environment (Abiding, 2009).

Supply: Rates of social housing provision in many countries are lower than demand rates. In most cases, public or private sector might be operating at small-scale levels due to limited resources. Power (2003) observes that many private organisations and government agencies are operating at small-scale levels that could not sustain proper knowledge and administrative capacity for SSHP including duplication of efforts and waste of resources.

Safety: Many sustainable social housing locations are witnessing persistent crime causing threat to the safety of life and property particularly in developing countries. Further, literature evidence shows that many social housing environments, particularly in developing countries, are without necessary security measures possibly due to a lack of resources, a mere neglect or wrong priority. On many occasions, pollution and environmental degradation are affecting residents of social housing.

Social cohesion: The lack of social cohesion in some social housing development signifies stigmatisation (Winston, 2009). This is as a result of the negative attitude that some people have for social and cultural mix (Power, 2003). Although, accommodating multiple interest groups (multiple tenure or tenancy) within sustainable social housing blocks might be necessary for social inclusion and avoidance of stigmatisation it could still lead to management problems (Dolata, 2008).

Strategies: Many countries do not have proper public monitoring institutions that are using necessary frameworks or performance indicators for measuring the level of sustainability attainment in sustainable social housing (Zakaria, 2007). Abidin (2009) argues that lack of incentives or encouragement to private developers for pursuing sustainability in their social housing projects is damping their morale. In addition, lack of stakeholders' involvement in the development process is a bane of SSHP (Williams and Dair, 2006).

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING SSHP

Suggestions that could address the barriers mentioned above can be given as follows:

- **Good Governance:** Governments should make sure that appropriate institutions are established to properly co-ordinate SSHP. Political stability and effective legal framework that protects stakeholders' interest and right to housing are essential.

- **Public Awareness:** Governments should make sure that every stakeholder in the sector acquires a full knowledge and understanding of the requirements of SSHP. This can be achieved through public enlightenment programmes, training, research and seminars including the provision of stakeholders' awareness booklets for: public officials, contractors, professionals and residents. These may douse the general poor perception about SSHP.

- **Adequate Funding:** Governments should boost the confidence of the private sector, and local and international financial institutions, through strong political will, and effective legal and institutional frameworks, for the release of the needed funds for implementing SSHP. In addition, governments should make effective use of the tax payers' money for the purpose of meeting housing needs.

- **Appropriate Technology:** There is need for governments to promote the use of appropriate technology and skills acquisition. This could help in minimising the incidence of poor workmanship, weak structures and use of unsustainable materials that are prone to environmental pollution including high energy usage.

- **Planning:** Governments and not-for-profit organisations should make proper planning from inception stage to achieve affordable and sustainable social housing. This could be realised through adequate planning for the various assisted financial programmes like subsidies and tax relieves. Qualitative and quantitative supply could also be guaranteed through effective planning.

- **Social Cohesion:** Sustainable social housing should be provided for meeting the needs of every social and economic class of resident. This could assist in avoiding stigmatisation and tagging of the SSHP as poor peoples' project. Developers should make sure that the safety of lives and property are guaranteed within the housing environment especially where there are different classes of residents.

- **Strategies:** Every developer should involve SSHP beneficiaries in the development process. Governments on the other hand should encourage and give incentives to the private developers and provide performance monitoring indicators for assessing sustainability attainment of every social housing project.

CONCLUSION

This study focused on barriers to SSHP and also offered suggestions for addressing them. Literature evidence shows that governments and non-profit making organisations intervened with the provision of social housing from around the First World War as a result of the failure of the market housing provision to meet housing needs. Despite the intention of the providers, social housing provision has currently failed to fully achieve the desired objective of meeting housing needs particularly for the low and middle-income earners. For instance, social housing provision which was intended to be a safety net for the most deprived might have been impaired by sustainability issues. The research therefore, reveals that the implementation of SSHP is besets with barriers causing affordability and sustainability issues while the most significant barrier is "governance".

Considering the aforementioned barriers, they do not seem to be difficult to overcome, if suggestions such as: good governance; public awareness; adequate funding; skills; technology; planning; social cohesion; and strategies; could be appropriately adopted. Stakeholders should take advantage of SSHP as it has a lot to offer in terms of affordability and sustainability for meeting housing needs. With a better understanding of the barriers and suggestions for improving SSHP, stakeholders would properly address the current inability to meet housing needs.

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