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REVIEW ARTICLE

MULTIHABITED HOUSE FORM: A MEANS TOWARDS ACHIEVING CITIES WITHOUT SLUMS IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

In many cities of the developing countries, the ability of housing authorities to provide housing and services for large number of poor people is limited. This is because cities are about opportunities, and across the world people have moved to cities in increasing numbers, especially poorer people seeking a new life with greater employment or livelihood opportunities whether real or perceived, and as such, slums develop. Slums pose a significant threat to the green agenda; and at the same time the brown agenda for those living in the slums is seriously compromised. Generally slums usually have dire consequences for the urban environment. Currently building cities without slums is one of the most important goals of urban planning in developing countries. This study provides explanation about the green and brown agenda of sustainable development in Africa, as well as a house form through which the poor can get access to accommodation in cities of developing countries. It proposes that this house form be adopted by governments of developing countries as a means of meeting the accommodation needs of the poor, in order to checkmate the proliferation of slums in developing cities.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most significant contributions of the United Nations to global thinking about the future in recent decades has been the concept of sustainable development. Sustainable development is that development that meets the needs of people without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In urban planning and in other professions, this has meant a new recognition of how environmental and social aspects of development need to be integrated with economic development, as well as meeting basic human needs for the poorest parts of the world. The application of the concept of sustainable development to cities started in the early 1990, following the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992, and the United Nations Commission on Human settlements at its 15th session in 1995, which identified the key measures needed to make sustainable development applicable to human settlements (Main and Satterthwaite 1994). The commission showed that sustainable development was not simply a new way to describe environmental protection, but a new concept of economic growth which provides for fairness and opportunity for all people in the world without destroying the world's national resources and without further compromising the carrying capacity of the globe.

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In 1996 therefore, the United Nations Human Settlements (UNCHS) now (UN Habitat) extended the concept of sustainable development to urban planning. (UNCHS 1996). Sustainable urban development planning therefore requires governance that can help create widely accessible infrastructure and community services (Talukder 2004). In many cities the ability to provide housing and services for large number of poor people is limited. As such slums develop, because of a combination of rapid rural – urban migration, increasing urban poverty and inequality, marginalization of poor neighbourhoods, inability of the urban poor to access affordable land for housing, insufficient investment in new low – income housing, and poor maintenance of the existing housing stock (UN – Habitat 2003). Because of the dominance of cities and towns in developed countries and rapid urbanization in developing countries, it is inevitable that urban areas currently use resources in very concentrated ways, with a major proportion of pollutants affecting the air, lakes, rivers, the ocean and the soil being generated there. On the positive side however, it is in the same urban areas that most economic development is located, technological and social advances are made, and the wealth upon which natural development is created. Sustainable cities should therefore be environmentally safe, socially inclusive and economically productive.

The United Nations Global report on Human Settlements in 2003 which was entitled the challenges of slums, presented the first global assessment of slums, emphasizing their problems and prospects. It showed that in many developing country

cities, the number of slum dwellers far exceeded the numbers in formal residences. It noted that at present slum dwellers constitutes 36.5% of the urban population in developing countries, with the percentage being as high as 62% in sub – Saharan Africa and 43% in Southern Asia (Global Report, The United Nations on Human Settlements (2003). Most slums in developing country cities are generally built on empty public or private land, on the periphery of the city, or elsewhere on physically unsafe land that is vulnerable to natural hazards. Often such land is on steep slopes prone to landslides or in low lying areas prone to flooding, or land that is so severely contaminated that no one else in the city wants it. And so, slums usually have dire consequences for the urban environment. They often deprive the city of foreshore land for flood control and natural bio – filtration from fringing wetland and vegetation, severe erosion can result from steep slopes when they are settled upon; and because the only source of domestic energy for slum dwellers is firewood, nearby land on the periphery of the city is often deforested. Thus, slums pose a significant threat to the green agenda generally, and also the brown agenda of those living in the slums is seriously compromised. This is because, most slums housing is built of simple and often makeshift materials that can only provide rudimentary protection against natural hazards. Invariably, levels of access to clean drinking water and safe sanitation are extremely low, resulting in basic health problems.

"Cities without slums" is currently one of the most important goals of urban planning in developing countries (UN Habitat 2009). During recent years, there has been a resurgence of global concern about slums, which clearly manifested in the adoption of specific targets on slums, drinking water and sanitation in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS). This study therefore examines the green and brown agenda as they relates to sustainable development, the effect of housing shortages as it relates to proliferation of slum in cities of developing countries, and recommends that multihabited houseform i.e a rooming house be adopted and constructed in large quantities by their government, to provide accommodation for the immigrant poor in cities of developing countries so as to checkmate the developments/proliferation of slums and squatter settlements.

Green and Brown Agenda

A significant dilemma that is facing planners as well as other urban professionals whenever they try to implement sustainable urban developments is how to integrate the two different sets of concerns of the "green agenda" and the "brown agenda" i.e. the natural environment and the human environment. The green agenda is about the natural systems of the local, bioregional and global ecosystem which are used by cities and other settlements as services for open space, biodiversity, water provision, waste dispersion, healthy air, and reliable climate, food and fibre. The aim of urban planning is to ensure that the green agenda is managed effectively, as green functions in a city are not always provided through the market mechanism. The brown agenda as well is essential for making a city work for a healthy and liveable environment and for creating the human and economic opportunities that have driven cities throughout their history. All cities consume land and resources such as energy, water and materials which are used for buildings and transport (Gironard, 1985; Kostof, 1991). The brown agenda depends upon how the metabolism of the city is managed, it is about the optimization of land use, engineering of waste systems, the minimizing of energy consumption and transport, the reduction in use of materials, and the creation of an efficient built environment. The brown agenda has always tended to assume the green agenda; Newman and Jenning, (2008) noted that the green agenda, consume it and dominate it. But now, since this is no longer feasible, cities need to reduce their impact upon the natural environment locally, ensure that bioregional ecosystems are not degraded and that the global ecosystems is not damaged by climate change. And so, a sustainable urban development must integrate the green and brown agendas by improving the human environment through reducing the impact of natural resource use. See Tables 1 and 2 for the green agenda as set out by the millennium Ecosystem Assessment and some facts about the brown agenda in cities respectively.

Addressing the slum challenge has now become an issue in the cities of most developing countries; and as such the global Report (2009) has suggested two strategies to address the phenomenon. The first; is large scale upgrading of existing slums and second is adoption of urban and housing policies that will prevent the emergence of new slums. Slum upgrading is concerned with the brown agenda. It consists of improving security of tenure through regularization of the rights to land and housing; and installing new or improving existing infrastructure and services up to a satisfactory standard, especially water supply, sanitation and waste management. The best practice in slum upgrading must involve the communities from the outset and contribution from the poor households. Addressing the issue of housing shortages especially among the poor in cities of developing countries will in no small measure prevent the emergence of new slums. Gilbert (1993) asserted that the majority of the urban population cannot afford the costs of conventional housing, such as apartments, single family house, and duplexes; and so they patronize the informal housing sector. Countries experiencing informal settlements growth are facing many problems related to urban poverty, higher unemployment, social hardships and conflicts. Residents of the informal settlements are often poor and disadvantaged facing many problems like lack of access to adequate roads, clean water, public transport and reliable power.

Multihabited House form

Housing has taken many forms in the world over and these forms engendered physical, social and psychological characteristics. The form ranges from single family house to large complexes of apartments housing different families. The form also includes some other types with both physical and social dimensions that distinguish it. This multihabited house form has both physical and social dimensions that distinguish it. The physical dimension as a building is that it is a rooming house whereby it is divided into separate rooms for rental accommodation in what is called a face – me – I – face you in Nigerian parlance, and sometimes as rent free in traditional family compounds.

Table 1. The green Agenda as set out by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment

- Species extinction rates are now 100 to 1000 times above the background rate. During the last several decades, 20 per cent of the world's coral reefs have been lost and 20 per cent degraded, whilst 35 per cent of mangrove area has been lost.
- 60 per cent of the increase in the atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide (CO_2) since 1750 has taken place since 1959. Climate change now threatens biodiversity and ecosystem services across the planet.
- Human beings produce as much biologically available nitrogen as all natural pathways and this may increase by a further 65 per cent by 2050.
- Approximately 60 per cent (15 out 24) of the ecosystem services evaluated in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment are being degraded or used unsustainably.
- 5 to possibly 25 per cent of global freshwater use exceeds long – term accessible supplies and 15 to 35 per cent of global freshwater use exceed supply rates and are therefore unsustainable. People now use between 40 and 50 per cent of all available fresh water running off the land. Water withdrawal has doubled over the past 40 years.
- A number of countries that appeared to have positive growth in net savings (wealth) in 2001 actually experienced a loss in wealth when degradation of natural resources was factored into the accounts.
- There is evidence that changes being made in ecosystems are increasing the likelihood of non – linear changes in ecosystems (including accelerating, abrupt and potentially irreversible changes), with important consequences for human well – being.
- One of the targets of the Millennium Development Goals is that, by 2010, there should be a significant reduction in the rate of loss of biodiversity and a reversal in the loss of environmental resources.

Sources: Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005

Table 2. The Brown Agenda in Cities; some facts

- In cities of the developing world, one out of four household lives in poverty; 40 per cent in African cities.
- 25 to 50 per cent of people in developing cities live in informal settlements.
- Fewer than 35 per cent of cities in the developing world have their wastewater treated; 2.5 billion people have no sanitation and 1.2 billion do not have access to clean water.
- Half of the urban population in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean suffer from one or more diseases associated with inadequate water and sanitation.
- Between one third and one half of the solid waste generated within most cities in low – and middle – income countries is not collected.
- Less than half of the cities of the world have urban environmental plans.
- Millennium Development Goals aim to halve the proportion of people without sanitation and clean water by 2015 and significantly improve the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020.

Sources: UNEP, 2002; UN – Habitat, 2008b

The social dimension of this house form makes it suitable for the poor or the low – income group, in that it provides many collectivist advantages to the residents. (Okeyinka 2014). Some scholars who have done one study or the other in multihabited dwellings concluded that multihabited house form is one of the ways through which the urban poor provide themselves accommodation in cities of developing countries. Korboe (1992) opined that the poor in cities of developing countries rent a room or suites of room as a way of coping with poverty and the struggle to meet accommodation need in urban environments of West African countries. Tipple (2004) also corroborated that multihabited house form allows inexpensive accommodation and provided many advantages of collectivist life for the residents. Slums is about the poor; and slums develop because of a combination of rapid rural – urban migration, increasing urban poverty and inequality, inability of the urban poor to access affordable land for house, inability of the urban poor to access low – income housing, and poor maintenance of the existing housing stock.

The spaces or the rooms as allocated in multihabited house form functions independently, accommodates extended families or individual households who are not related. (Okeyinka 2014). One thing is common among the households, it is an accommodation which suits their budgets, and which is providing some cultural, social and economic support for the residents. People living in cities of developing countries belong to different socio – economic groups, but literature have shown that majority of city dwellers belonged to the low – income groups, and as such large number of households could not afford to own or rent a single household dwelling such as an apartment, or a detached building. While the current trend of addressing the issues of slums is in two categories of slum upgrading and the adoption of urban and housing policies that prevent the emergence of new slums. This paper therefore recommends the adoption of multihabited house form whether as a family compound or Brazilian house of face – me – I – face you by the government of developing countries to provide accommodation for the low – income groups; this is because:

- Multihabitated house form allows inexpensive accommodation; and once this category of people can secure accommodation in these house type, there would not be any need for them to put up makeshift building on empty or private land, or on the periphery of the city.
- Also, multi – habitation which describes the social situation within a multihabited house form thrives in the traditional African environments and it is still prevalent in the urban African environments because of the many collectivists advantages, African culture encourages multi – habitation especially in the traditional compound housing. Governments of developing countries can provide large quantities of compound houses to accommodate several households, and also provide the residents with clean water and other necessary infrastructure. If this is adopted, it is believed that it will go a long way in preventing the emergence of new slums which is the concern of the global report.

Conclusion

The presence of slums in urban cities of developing countries constitutes a great challenge to both the green and brown

agenda of the millennium development goals. Its continual emergence is seen as an afront against the efforts of the UN-Habitat. Indeed, it constitutes a serious threat to global health if not arrested. In this study, we looked at the concepts and functionality of both the green and brown agenda vis –a- vis the need for sustenable urban development. It was observed that for several socio- economic reasons, the rural- urban migration has come to stay. It is therefore pertinent to design a framework for arresting the acute housing problem arising from the movement from rural to urban centres. In connection with this, a house form; multi-habitation: multi-habitation is proposed; as a possible solution for adoption by governments in developing countries for urban low- income earners. Multihabited houses can accommodate many households, it is also a form of housing that is supported even by the African culture. If adopted, then governments will have to provide basic infrastructure such as clean water, roads, waste disposal systems with it. Doing so, will make it habitable, and as such assist the housing authorities overcome the problem of acute housing shortage for urban dwellers in developing countries.

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