

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE EVOLUTION OF HOUSING POLICY FRAMEWORK

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Globally, housing policies have been used as an attempt to try and address housing problems, particularly in respect to the low-income earners, with the view of helping them access better housing. The evolution of housing policy in developing countries has been studied and identified in different ways, however, this paper present a robust theoretical background of the developments in housing policy framework. The data used in this paper were derived from secondary sources only; through a detailed review of related literature on the subject to meet the research objectives. The study is an in-depth literature exploration of the theoretical perspective of the housing studies framework. The literature reviewed found that the theory of housing had its origin in the Paleolithic period when homo-sapiens began to use natural materials like stone, wood, leaves, animal skin and other similar items to create shelter from elements of weather. It was also found that there are various theoretical perspective frameworks that have been used in the study of housing, such as political; social; developmental; institutional; and radical perspectives amongst others. This study provides a robust theoretical framework used in housing study.

Keywords: Low-income, Developing countries Theoretical perspective.

1 INTRODUCTION

Housing policy is a guideline provided by government through the negotiation of various bodies in a country as put together by the government, which is intended at meeting the housing need and demand of the people through a set of suitable approaches including fiscal, institutional, legal and regulatory frameworks (Agbola 1998). Housing policies provides a guide which defines action and sets goals and in most cases specify strategies for achieving the goal. It further institutes guidelines and limits for discretionary actions by individuals liable for implementing the overall plans of action (Olatubara 2002). It, as a system of courses of action, regulatory measures, laws, and funding priorities concerning a given topic promulgated by a governmental entity or its representatives. According to Duruzoechi (1999) some housing policy decisions (written or implied) prompt the overall past work of government, whilst others are goal statements or prescriptions of elemental rules for the conduct of personal or organizational affairs. Housing policy is fundamentally necessary in any country as a guide or control on the various actors in the housing sector.

Furthermore, housing policy as a governmental action is generally the principled guide to housing action taken or to be taken by the administrative or executive branches of a state with regard to a class of issues in a manner consistent with law and institutional customs. In general, the foundation of any housing policy is the pertinent national and sub-national constitutional law and implementing legislation. Sometimes, it is embodied in constitutions, legislative acts, and judicial decisions. The main goals of any housing policy is to achieve the best possible use of existing housing resources in order to ensure adequate housing for the people, guide the location of new housing, and be responsive to the housing needs of 'special people' such as the low-income groups. Furthermore, they are typically legislated through official written documents. Housing policy documents often come with the endorsement or signature of the executive powers within the country or organization to legitimize the policy and show that it is considered enforced. They often have standard formats that are particular to the country or organization issuing the policy.

All housing policies usually have a cycle; which is a system used for the evaluation of the development of a policy item. The policy cycle is also referred to as a 'stagist approach'. A typical housing policy cycle includes the following stages: Agenda Setting (Problem identification); Policy Formulation; Adoption of the policy; Implementation; and Evaluation of the policy. Policy cycles are usually considered as adopting a classical approach. Hence some postmodern academics challenge cyclical models as unresponsive and unrealistic, preferring systemic and more complex models (Young and Enrique 2009). Young and Enrique (2009) consider a broader range of actors involved in the policy space that includes civil society organizations, the media, intellectuals, think tanks or policy research institutes, corporations, lobbyists, amongst others. Housing policy addresses the intent of the state or any organization, whether government, business, professional, or voluntary. It is intended to affect the 'real' world, by guiding the decisions that are made. Whether they are formally written or not, most organizations and national states have identified and formulated policies in almost all relevant aspects of the economy such as the housing sector. Though the evolution of housing policy in developing countries has been studied and identified in different ways. Therefore, this paper presents a robust theoretical background of the developments in housing policy framework. The data used in this paper were derived from secondary sources only; through a detailed review of related literature on the subject to meet the research objectives. The study is an in-depth literature exploration of the theoretical perspective of the housing studies framework. The next section of the study discusses the theoretical perspective of housing studies, thereafter, a discussion of the evolution of housing policy is presented before the purpose and objectives of policy are discussed. Thereafter, conclusion and policy implication for the study are stated.

2 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE OF HOUSING STUDY

The theory of housing has its origin in the Paleolithic period when homo-sapiens began to use natural materials like stone, wood, leaves, animal skin and other similar items to create shelter from elements of weather (Ifesanya 2003). Housing has been defined by different scholars in different ways depending on the emphasis and focus of analysis. However, the basic definition has been housing as shelter and for the provision of human needs. The initial form of housing was the post and beam construction of the

Stone Age, when the principal and perhaps, the only motivating factor for housing was fortification from external aggression and from climatic elements like sun, rain, heat, cold and other extreme weather conditions. This nonetheless cannot be referred to as housing, but ordinary shelter. The United Nations in 1978; however, defined housing not simply as a shelter, but also as a means of creating communities, providing great emphasis on the functions which housing has to perform, thus making housing a multi-dimensional concept.

As described above, housing in today's expression has become a multi-dimensional bundle of services, encompassing the need for privacy, aesthetic value, and conformity to statutory standards, fiscal economy and other related issues of importance in contemporary society (Ifesanya 2003). The house is only a constituent part of housing, and its functionality and quality is determined by the surroundings, that is, the environment. Also, it is the process of providing a large number of residential buildings on a permanent basis with adequate physical infrastructure and social services, planned decent, safe and sanitary neighborhoods to meet the basic and special needs of the people. This fundamental perception of housing has since given way to an all-inclusive definition. Adequate housing offers a refuge for emotional and physical rest, and the stability found therein empowers families in their pursuit of a better quality of life. The importance of a decent place to live cannot be overstated, for with it comes stability and promise, family unity, hope and a foundation from which individuals reach their full potential. Further, adequate housing enhances healthy living. Learning and academic accomplishment are also enhanced by adequate housing; while emotional stability and psychological balance are constructed by having a decent and comfortable place to live.

These diverse classifications make the study of housing a complex issue opened to various interpretations. Tan (2001) thus classified these various perspectives as follows: political perspective; social perspective; developmental perspective; institutional perspective; radical perspective; comparative approach; historical approach; experiential perspective; and neo-classical perspective. While Tan's (2001) classification of housing gave a valid view, it would have been an all-inclusive view if the economic perspective was included as a separate entity, thus developing a framework that would have disentangled the multi-dimensional concept attached to housing.

3 EVOLUTION OF HOUSING POLICY

Whilst there is no universally established definition of housing policy as observed from the previous section, however, there are two established views of what housing policies need to be. Malpass and Murie (1999) highlighted these two viewpoints as the static view and the dynamic views. The first is associated with how things are done as a matter of routine, characterized by general rules and conventions governing practice. It reflects recognized positions on housing topics. This is very significant in many African countries, where there are no specific policy documents, although the practice has changed in some countries, yet there are entrenched practices in housing. The vigorous view of policy tends to be more prevalent where there is overt action to resolve a housing problem. Malpass and Murie (1999) further inform that this implies

specific actions, relating to a problem defined in a specific way, in pursuit of some objectives. This view of policy involves change, towards some end and also needs a policy process. The policy process includes: problem formulation, planning, execution and evaluation (Malpass and Murie 1999). However, most of the housing policy formulated in African countries either end up not being implemented or when they are implemented, they are never evaluated. This present study is on the evaluation of the South African housing subsidy delivery system and to profile solution towards the variables that are considered essentials in the creation of sustainable and habitable human settlements.

Globally, housing policies have been used as an attempt to try and address housing problems, especially with respect to the low-income earners, with the view of helping them access better housing (Harris and Giles 2003). The evolution of housing policy in developing countries has been studied and identified in different ways. According to Harris and Giles (2003) the following phases have been identified by scholars as a definite time lag in the evolution of housing policy: the period of public housing provision (1945-1960s); sites-and-services (1972-1980s) and market enabling (1980s – present). However, Harris and Giles (2003) further claim that this grouping is based on the policy recommendations that international agencies recommended and focuses less on policies that nations pursued, as can be seen from the current adoption of the Cities Without Slum Agenda and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by developing countries. In each period, scholars have supposed that the policies adopted by national governments in the developing world matched the recommendations of international agencies. Harris and Giles (2003) also claim that the assumption by the various researchers was based on ‘meager evidence’ and is challenged by the earlier statements made by informed observers. For instance, it was observed that about 40 years ago the UN’s Bureau of Social Affairs observed that several countries in Latin America had been providing public housing regardless of the UN’s preference for self-help (Harris and Giles 2003).

Housing Policy Framework for planning about development has changed in important ways over the last three decades. UN-Habitat in 2006, informs that the initial planning concepts of the top-down strategies have gradually given way to the market and people-based solutions, process approaches, and strong emphasis is repeatedly being placed on building capacities and institutions through the policy. Thus, current housing policies of nations of the world have been influenced by these dynamics. The early focus of housing policy framework was on physical planning and public housing, which quickly gave way, first to ‘self-help’ housing projects, which was used to service the middle income households. This proved to be an unsustainable option over time to address the needs of the poor due to the high subsidies that were involved. This later evolved into the ‘enabling approach’ which concentrated on maximizing the contributions of all the stakeholders in housing production within a supportive legal and regulatory framework. However, in reality, the evolution of housing policy is never so neat nor linear as this, and there are always instances of which agencies or governments seek to return to ways of doing things, which have long-been discredited. This is principally the case where there is political pressure to show quick results through, for instance, large-scale evictions of squatters or construction of public or subsidized private housing. For instance, the Botshabelo Accord of 1994 in South Africa, which

sought support for the construction of one million housing units each year through the commercial private sector, is a good example. However, due to lack of resources and neglect in policy to utilize rental housing alternatives which could mobilize private capital, a mere ten per cent were actually built and none went to the poor in the first two years; but the initial projection has since been exceeded.

4 OBJECTIVES OF HOUSING POLICY

A major feature that makes the issue of housing multifaceted is that 'housing' does not simply relate to the provision of shelter alone. This is because; in obtaining shelter the individual gains access to a number of different products. Housing has the potential to contribute to an improved quality of life and this should direct the formulation of a housing policy. Most countries universally set their housing policy objectives based on the current housing situation prevalent in the economy at that time. Thus, there is no country with the same wordings of housing policy objectives, but each has unique features that most times follow in the same line of thinking as proposed by the international housing agencies responsible for monitoring of shelter provision. However, the main products associated with a housing policy decision, and the objectives which should be associated with them in an ideal situation are access to land, access to a good habitable socio-economic location, access to adequate services, access to adequate shelter and access to an adequate external, social and physical environment. All of the factors have some relevance in any housing policy formulation and do not represent a sequential list of priorities, which must be satisfied on a one-to-one basis, but all must be present to some degree or other for any housing policy to succeed, which is the reason for its formulation. If all are present, and all of the objectives satisfied, the situation would be optimal. It follows from this that no single ideal approach or package exists and that centralized, external agencies cannot decide on priorities.

5 THE PURPOSE OF HOUSING POLICY

The effectiveness of a housing policy cannot be judged in isolation from what it is expected to do. It would be completely wrong to design a new housing policy or to propose changes to an existing policy or to implement a housing policy without a clear view about the purpose of the housing policy (new or revised). This should logically be examined within the context of the overall purpose of housing policy and the place of the entities overall goal within the policy as the effectiveness of a housing policy is about the ability of the policy to achieve its purposes. Hence, the primary purpose of any housing policy is provide the whole population adequate and secure housing for all by unblocking and unleashing all potential energies and resources, from a wide variety of sources, which can play a role in improving living conditions. Possible but not exhaustive lists of housing policy purposes include: help low income groups access decent housing; help low income households have adequate post housing expenditure incomes; improve the quality of housing consumed by low income groups; increase housing choices for households with unmet housing needs; increase the supply of

housing in the society; improve the quality of urban neighborhoods; improve the functioning of urban labor markets; promote community cohesion; improve the functioning of the macro-economy; and promote environmental sustainability. In most nations of the world, housing policies are becoming increasingly integrated with a wide range of social and economic objectives, which mean that housing policy is reaching further down the list above than was the case in past decades.

6 CONCLUSIONS

This research paper presents a robust theoretical background of the developments in housing policy framework. The literature reviewed found that the theory of housing had its origin in the Paleolithic period when homo-sapiens began to use natural materials like stone, wood, leaves, animal skin and other similar items to create shelter from elements of weather. It was also found that there are various theoretical perspective frameworks that have been used in the study of housing, such as political; social; developmental; institutional; and radical perspectives amongst others. This study provides a robust theoretical framework used in housing study. The clear policy implication from the study is that more individuals can determine their own priorities, the better the situation and the greater the range of choices available to people, the more they are assisted. Thus, it should be recognized that housing policy objectives require a framework which locates the housing issue within its broader urban context - a framework of broader issues, which should inform the direction of housing policy in the specific context of any country.

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