

Urban Housing Issues in Nigerian Cities: A Case for Real Estate Maintenance as a Sustainable Option for Trans-Ekulu Housing Estate, Enugu, Nigeria

Kingsley Efobi^{1*} Christopher Anierobi²

1. Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Nigeria, Enugu campus, PMB 01129, Nigeria
2. Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Nigeria, Enugu campus, PMB 01129, Nigeria

* E-mail of the corresponding author: okey.efobi@unn.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

Housing delivery has become a global issue. The millennium development goal identified housing as a basic human need and proposed shelter for all by 2015. Here in Nigeria, the rate of rapid urbanization, rural-urban migratio and haphazard development of houses in some Nigerian cities have resulted to the associated blight, squalor and slum conditions, occasioned by high occupancy ratio and congestion and these have been the bane of urban housing delivery, especially in Enugu. As the 553rd city in the world as well as the capital City of Enugu state, the City of Enugu has many educational, industrial and governmental establishments. The city enjoys an urban growth rate of 2.5% and a current urban population of about 927,642 residents. As a result, Enugu faces high housing needs that require a sustainable approach. This paper focuses on real estate maintenance as a sustainable option for the improvement of housing estates in Enugu using the Trans-Ekulu housing estate as a case study. 10% of the housing stock in each street of the estate was studied. A total of 114 household heads of the randomly selected houses were the respondents. Among other things; the study revealed that approximately 83% of the total housing stock in the estate was dilapidated due to gross lack of maintenance as measured by the presence of rusted and leaking roof, cracked walls and weak foundation, broken doors and windows, unpainted or deteriorated paints, deteriorated housing facilities and non availability of some facilities and landscape elements. Policy review and integrated action and co-operation among relevant professionals involved in the planning, development and management of housing estates in Enugu as well as public participation among others were recommended.

Key Words: Urban Housing, Real Estate Maintenance, Sustainable Options, Trans-Ekulu Housing Estate, Enugu, Nigeria

1.0 Introduction

The numerous activities of man in his quest for development have contributed to the alarming rate of urbanization which is now witnessed in the whole world. According to Oruwari (1984) “four out of every ten of the world’s population now live in urban centers”. Here in Nigeria, this rapid urbanization has resulted in a number of problems of which housing is very significant. Enugu as the 553rd city in the world as well as the capital of Enugu state; hosts many educational, industrial and government establishments with an urban growth rate of 2.5% and a current urban population of about 927,642 residents (Nigerian Demographic profile, 2013; NPC, 2006, Enugu state Wikipedia, 20012). As a result, the city faces high housing needs that require a sustainable approach. The combined efforts of both the public and private sectors towards solving the issue have had only a very minimal impact. In addition, the problem is further compounded by a total lack of maintenance for the already existing ones such that it has become rather common to find houses in Enugu with rusty roofs, loose ridges and overlaps. In some cases, their facials either do not exist or are-dangerously hanging. Others have their doors and windows mutilated or dismembered with dangerous cracks on the walls and foundations, even to the point of building collapse thereby destroying lives and properties. Real estate can be described as a large area of land with buildings. Generally, the word “real estate”, can be broken down into various groups which include – housing and industrial estates. However, this paper will focus mainly on housing estates. Sustainable options that can be employed in achieving proper development and maintenance of real estates in Enugu and other Nigerian cities were also highlighted.

2.0 Lack of Maintenance on Trans-Ekulu Housing Estates in Enugu

The Enugu state government established Trans-Ekulu housing estate in 1976 in order to ameliorate housing problems.

In this study, observation and interview methods were employed on a 10% of the housing stock by residences in each street of Trans Ekulu Housing Estate. A total of 114 household heads of the randomly selected houses were the respondents. Among other things; the study revealed that approximately 83% of the total housing stock in the

estate has dilapidated due to gross lack of maintenance as measured by the presence of rusted and leaking roof, cracked walls and weak foundation, broken doors and windows, unpainted or deteriorated paints, deteriorated housing facilities and non availability of facilities and landscape elements. This is portrayed in table 1.

Existing Condition of Housing Stock in Trans-Ekulu Housing Estate, Enugu

S/no.	Streets	No. Of buildings/ residences	No.of observed buildings/ residences	% No. of Dilapidated buildings/ residences
1.	Phase 1	373	30	28 (93%)
2.	Phase 2	222	20	16 (80%)
3.	Phase 3	326	30	26 (90%)
4.	Phase 4	223	20	16 (90%)
5.	Phase 5	220	20	17 (85%)
6.	Phase 6	156	10	7 (70%)
7.	CBN (Ivory quarters)	78	7	6 (85%)
8.	TOTAL	1,398	137	114(83)

Source: Enugu East Town Planning Authority, Computed by Researcher, 2013.

The establishment of the estate ought to have followed due recognition that real estate development and maintenance pre-supposes a calculated attempt to establish, support, sustain or to uphold a given property. It helps to ensure that high standard facilities are provided and that those provided do not deteriorate, so as to maintain its functionality, safety and aesthetic beauty, for man’s use and enjoyment.

Here in Enugu, the story is completely different as most of the housing estates owned or developed either by government or private enterprises have deteriorated due to lack of proper maintenance. For instance, many of the roads and streets have turned into patches of pot-holes. The streets known as, Jim Nwobodo Avenue, Hill view and North-Fifth Avenue are typical examples. Drainage facilities which were provided for the North-First and North-Second areas have deteriorated so much that the residents of these areas now suffer from flooding, erosion and other environmental problems. Walls are pushed down after very heavy rainfalls; streets are flooded like in North-First Avenue among others. Furthermore, the Phase 5 areas of this estate are so badly neglected that they have become breeding grounds for all sorts of rodents, reptiles and other wild animals. The entire estate is so devoid of several landscape features that can add to the beauty of a housing estate, save for few individual homes. There is for instance, a stream in the estate with recreation potentials which is yet to be exploited. While other landscape features like street furniture are completely lacking or not properly coordinated; some of the utilities provided have been over stretched due to a rapid increase in the number of residents. The refuse disposal dumpsters along Dhamija road and at the road Junction of Jim Nwobodo and Federal Avenue and along Trans-Ekulu primary school road for instance are always over-filled with refuse thus, making the whole environment filthy, dirty and unsightly. These are some of the things a real estate can suffer from when it is not properly developed and maintained.

3.0 Sustainable and Strategic Options for Real Estate Maintenance

Various strategic options can be used for the development and maintenance of real estates to ensure sustainability. Besides reinventing the organizational structure of real estate development and maintenance agency to effectively incorporate formal and informal sector participation as portrayed in Efobi et al (2013) and Anierobi et al 2013 the following measures should be considered and effectively employed. They include additions, subtractions, upgrading and modifications.

3.1 Additions

As a strategic option for real estate maintenance, various additions might be necessary in order to achieve a balanced environment. Additions here may not imply the provision of more houses, roads etc. within the existing stock; rather, it might involve injecting more life into the environment, by refurbishing the entire area. This can

be achieved by landscaping and adding neighborhood facilities, services and utilities that hitherto had not been implemented.

Landscaping here refers to the integration of various landscape elements into the environment in order to bring the area into closer harmony with nature. These landscape elements include vegetation (plants), water bodies and features of landscape like street furniture. Plants can serve to relate buildings to the site and to other buildings thereby linking external spaces with the built environment. They can be used to demarcate houses, for screening and visual barrier, thereby concealing undesirable sights. They can also guide and direct pedestrians and vehicular circulations within the real estate while providing resting places and shades for road users. Some strategic spots within the Trans-Ekulu housing estate such as the T-junctions, rotary intersections or roundabouts, internal and external compounds of individual schools, churches and recreational spots and parks as well as all public spaces in the estate can be made unique and beautiful with some landscape features that commemorate important events in history. While available water body within the estate could be exploited to further enhance the quality of the area. In some special places like in parks, large school compounds such as the Anglican school at Hill view Avenue in the estate; artificial water bodies like swimming pools can be created. Water bodies have the potential of making an environment serene, comfortable and good for relaxation because of its beautiful sparkling color and cooling effects, thereby serving some recreational purposes in the midst of other land uses for sustainable development.

3.2 Subtraction

Within the Trans-Ekulu Housing estate, some areas which have been ear-marked for particular purposes have been converted into other uses. For instance, most of the houses originally developed for residential purposes have been converted into commercial uses e.g. the Cinac supermarket along Nnamdi Azikiwe Avenue directly opposite Road 12 leading to Trans-Ekulu primary school was once a residential building in the estate. In same vein, the area set apart as a commercial centre directly opposite Trans-Ekulu primary school was observed to be mostly unoccupied by the allocated activity. Also observed were the addition of small kiosks and farms or poultry houses to some existing residential buildings. The proliferations of informal sector activities seem to be defacing the estate and this is also true for other estates in Enugu and other cities in Nigeria. For instance, right from the entrance into Trans-Ekulu estate at Nnamdi Azikiwe Avenue of the estate, different types of workshops for artisans, kiosks, temporal structures and make shift shades are scattered all over the area ranging from mechanics' workshops, photographers, barbers, tailors, hair dressers, petty traders, shoe makers, battery chargers and vulcanizers all have shops littering the environment. Such unsightly scenarios should be subtracted so that particular areas originally ear-marked for specific land uses and purposes in the master plan of the housing estate can be sustainably utilized.

3.3 Modification

This involves changing the former status of a particular utility or its locations to a more convenient place or situation; like a cross-road that is known to be causing accidents. A typical example is the X-intersection joining Federal Avenue, North-Fifth and Upper North-Fifth Avenues in Trans-Ekulu Housing Estate. This intersection can be modified into a round-about or reduced to a T-Junction. This will reduce environmental problems and hazards such as accidents while improving the functionality of the estate and reduce socioeconomic losses.

3.4 Upgrading

Upgrading as a strategic option for real estate maintenance involves salvaging and correcting buildings that are structurally sound but which for some reasons are losing their utility values. Such buildings can be upgraded by repairing or redesigning them. The present economic crunch in the country has made this strategy very popular. Upgrading can be easily carried out by owners of such properties themselves. The relevant authority can supervise to ensure that such upgrading is carried out to pre-determined standards as set down by the Planning authority. This also includes the upgrading of existing roads and other neighborhood facilities and services. The roads which were previously not well finished could be finished and tarred and provisions made for drainage facilities just as the state government recently upgraded and tarred Dhamija road and working on Trans-Ekulu primary school road. Other roads which were previously tarred but which have degenerated are also being upgraded.

From what we have seen so far, it is certain that the application of one or more of the above mentioned strategies in the development and maintenance of real estates in the country will help to improve the nation's urban areas.

4.0 Need for the Co-operation of Different Professionals in the Maintenance of Housing Estates in Enugu

Real estate maintenance is not an easy task. It calls for the combined efforts of different professionals. These professionals include Town Planners, Architects, Landscape Architects, and Estate Surveyors among others as

agreed by Taiwo (1987), Efobi, (1988) and Fair (1974). The services of each of these groups can be seen in their roles in the various strategies discussed above.

(a)Town Planners: Planning is indispensable to the design, implementation and maintenance of real estates. This is because planners provide the framework within which all developments take place in real estates. They are therefore meant to control and co-ordinate maintenance activities so as to ensure compliance to already set standards. In addition, if a property owner wishes to add or modify his property, he must obtain the needed approvals and supervision from the town planners.

(b)Architects: Architects play very prominent roles in the design of buildings and their construction and so have a great contribution to make during the maintenance stage. For example, if a property owner wishes to add or subtract from his property, the Architects are in a better position to ascertain the structures that constitute a threat to human life and which are also below standard. They can also advise on the illegal use of areas earmarked for particular activities which have been converted into other uses and the effects of illegal structures on the approved existing ones. During the upgrading and modification stages, they can thus help to recommend and specify various materials that can be used to repair and correct buildings and roads so as to increase the utility value of such properties.

(c) Landscape Architects: Landscape Architects because of their knowledge of landscaping can add, subtract, upgrade and consequently improve on the aesthetic and economic value of a real estate. The introduction of vegetation (plants) which is a very important urban landscape element along the roads and streets can change even the most hostile, drab and bare real estates into hospitable and pleasant ones. Landscape architects can also advise on the manipulation of the landform in and around the estate and the provision of services to the benefit of the residents. They can work hand in hand with both Architects and Planners in the maintenance of both natural and man-made features to enhance the good look of the environment for sustainability.

(d) Estate Surveyors: The Estate Surveyor manages completed estates and also usually arranges for the buying and selling of land and buildings and so is in a better position to monitor the condition of the real estate and advise other professionals and owners on possible contributions to make. Moreover, if feasibility studies are called for, they can undertake preliminary technical appraisal for the maintenance of the project, to enable the clients and other professionals decide whether or not to proceed and in what form. According to Umeh (1977) feasibility studies are concerned with the fundamental question of practicability or possibility of the visualized or contemplated decision, be it on development projects, planning schemes and the likes. As Radcliffe (1981) puts it, with knowledge of construction techniques, economics, law, town planning and valuation; the estate surveyor is well aware of the physical, administrative, legal and financial constraints that beset the management and condition of the built environment.

However, in carrying out these functions, these professionals face some problems like insufficient finance for real estate development and maintenance. Sometimes, they lack the relevant legal backing and even the co-operation and sensitivity of the public. In addition, the whole processes involved in maintenance services for real estates calls for efficient co-ordination and Co-operation between various professionals as we have seen above. But this needed co-operation is sometimes lacking because the professionals are not united among themselves to pursue such a common purpose.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Adoption of maintenance culture will help improve the quality of housing estates especially and other Nigerian cities in general. In this way, the high standards of facilities earlier provided can be retained or upgraded thereby, avoiding unwarranted and unnecessary deterioration.

In the light of all our discussions so far, it is obvious that the maintenance of real estates will not only help to preserve the economic value of developed properties, but will also serve as a way of improving Nigeria's urban built environment. Though the task of maintenance on its own involves a number of processes, which in turn requires the services and co-operation of various professionals, the fact still remains that maintenance is an aspect of our developmental processes which should no longer be relegated to the background. In order to ensure that this essential service is not totally neglected, the following recommendations are made:

- i) Government should set up efficient machinery to evolve and adopt maintenance policies that will be a guide to all owners of real estates in Nigeria while existing related ones should be adequately reviewed to ensure sustainability and efficiency.
- ii) There should be participation of the different professionals who are involved in the planning, development and management of housing estates so as to bring their combined efforts to bear on the maintenance of housing estates, for sustainability
- iii) There is need for effective public participation and enlightenment of the public on the importance of sustainable housing estate maintenance in our urban areas.

REFERENCES:

- Anierobi Christopher .M. and Efobi Kingsley . O (2013): Towards incorporating the informal sector operators in the Organizational structure of solid waste management agencies in Anambra state, Nigeria. Journal of civil and environmental research, ISSN 2224-5790 , Vol.3, no.9, 2013; www.iiste.org
- Efobi Kingsley .O. and Anierobi Christopher .M. (2013): Re-Inventing the Organizational Structure of Environmental Management Agencies of Nigerian Cities: Towards Sustainable Service Delivery In Anambra State. Journal of Public Policy and Administration Research ISSN 2224-5731. www.iiste.org
- Efobi, K.O. (1988): “Real Estate Maintenance as a Strategy for Improving the Nigerian Urban Centres”. Proceedings of the National Conference on Maintenance, Management and Technology, organized by the Faculty of Environmental Science, ASUTECH, Enugu, 4th -18th, November.
- Fair, Brother N. (1974): Nature of Landscape Design. London Penguin, Ltd.
- Enugu East Town Planning Authority (2013): official records, Enugu.
- Nigeria Demographic profile (2013)
- National Population Commission, NPC (2006): Census figure, Official Gazette, Enugu
- Oruwari, M.O. (1984): “Federal Government Low Cost Housing Projects” Proceeding of the National Conference titled, “The Urban Poor in Nigeria” University of Benin, April 17-19-1984.
- Radcliffe, John (1983): Town and Country Planning, London Hutchinson Group Ltd.
- Taiwo, Jide (1987): “The Economic Advantage of the co-operation between architects and Estate Surveyors to the Building Industry in Nigeria”. Journal of the Nigerian Institute of Architects vol. 3, no. 3 December.
- Umeh, J.A. (1977): Feasibility and Viability Appraisal. Ibadan, Onbibonoje Publisher.