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Urban Regeneration – Eradicating Urban Decay for Improved Human Settlement

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ABSTRACT

The built environment in many developing countries particularly Nigeria is fast decaying of which the factors responsible can be traced to increased urbanization, rural urban migration, poor quality of original construction, lack of integrated planning, steady economic recession, negligent urban housekeeping, disaster and war. The urbanization process in Nigeria cities have not been matched with a corresponding supply of adequate housing, basic amenities and social infrastructure thus resulting to a gradual dilapidation of existing ones and consequently leading to urban decay. This paper examines urban regeneration as a vibrant tool for eradicating urban decay for improved human settlement. It proposes some professional approaches and solution that can suit local conditions in Nigeria, specifically outlining how we can make significant contribution to eradicate urban decay in order to salvage our Nigerian dying cities.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the critical problems facing the Nigerian cities has been that of deteriorating living conditions leading to increased death rate and diseases caused by pollution and poor sanitation. Being a developing country, the environmental and social consequences of urbanization are quite visible. The urban phenomenon is continuously increasing, extending the boundaries of cities and metropolitan areas of the country.

It is a reality that in the big cities in Nigeria such as Lagos, Ibadan, Port Harcourt and Benin there are a number of problems present which includes urban decay, slum, overcrowding, lawlessness, invasion of peri-urban spaces thus causing deforestation. According to Atere 2001; a joint study by the Lagos state government and a United Nations group discovered that about 42 towns in Lagos alone could be classified as slum and in dire need of regeneration. The basis of urban crisis lies in the dimensions and expansion of the large cities where these problems becomes even more severe. The culmination of these problem degenerates into the term '*Urban Decay*'.

UNDERSTANDING URBAN DECAY

Urban decay also known as urban rot and urban blight. It is the process whereby a previously functioning city, or part of a city, falls into disrepair and decrepitude. It may feature deindustrialization, depopulation or changing population, restructuring, abandoned building, high unemployment rate, fragmented families, political disenfranchisement, crime and a desolate in hospitable city landscape.

Urban decay is manifested in the peripheral slums at the outskirts of a metropolis, while the city center and the inner city retain high real estate values and sustain a steadily increasing populace (Arimah, 2001). Another characteristic of urban decay is 'blight'-the visual, psychological and physical effects of living among empty lots, buildings and condemned houses. Such desolated properties are socially dangerous to the community because they attract criminals and street gangs, contributing to the volume of crime.

Urban decay has no single cause; it results from a combination of interrelated socio-economic conditions which may include; poor urban planning and decision, tight rent control, the poverty level of the local populace, depopulation by suburbanization of peripheral lands, real estate neighbourhood redlining, immigration restrictions and racial discrimination. (Bello, 2002)

The major visible outcome of urban decay is slum and ghetto. The proliferation of slums in Nigeria has been over the years a matter of great concern. As cited by Olotuah, A.O., 75% dwelling units in urban centers in Nigeria are substandard and the dwelling sited in slum. The inadequacy of the quality of most urban housing stems mainly from the poor physical state of the buildings. They are often unsafe and insecure and do not provide adequate shelter from the elements of weather. The environment in which the buildings are located is squalid in most cases, and this generally leads to slum conditions.

GOALS OF URBAN REGENERATION

It's a known fact that our built environment is fast decaying, and the citizens on their own together with public institution cannot save them alone. Government must step in and help the citizens with urban regeneration, therefore it can be said that urban regeneration is a deliberate effort to change the urban environment through planned large-scale adjustment of existing city areas to present and future requirements for urban living and working (Osuide 2004). In response to continual exhortation and pressure to do something to 'save' the built environment and improve housing, the goals of regeneration should attempt to do the following:

- Eliminate sub-standard and other inadequate housing through clearance of slum and blighted areas.
- Stimulate sufficient housing production and community development to remedy the housing shortage.
- Realize the goals of decent homes and suitable living environment.

These goals no doubt are lofty. Better homes, improved neighborhoods and the elimination of slums all are desirable. The difficulty is not with the goals, but with the means of accomplishing them and with the consequences that result.

CONDITIONS FOR AN EFFECTIVE URBAN REGENERATION

Proper urban development in Nigeria, must consider all the problems of urban community – physical, social, cultural and

aesthetics. If the nation is to develop, slums must be eradicated and the families from there must have decent housing. Blight must be removed and its further spread prevented. Rundown business sections need rehabilitation and industrial areas be cleaned up.

The physical problem as well as socio economic problem must be tackled together with high regards towards the inhabitants. Poverty should also be addressed with increase in the income level of workers. For successful urban decay eradication, there is the need to stimulate an effective rural development programme, by the provision of basic amenities, services and infrastructure facilities, small-scale industries etc. These would encourage development in the rural areas and consequently, serve as growth poles and springboards for the redistribution of population and traffic patterns for sustainable balance development. Uchegbu, and Iroakazi, (2009).

DEFINING METHODS OF URBAN REGENERATION

It has been argued that there are two ways of tracking the problems of decay arising from uncontrolled growth; indirect and direct regeneration. (Dessai & Pillai 1990)

Indirect regeneration; This is carried out by rural-urban migration controlled through redistribution of land to peasants, creating new settlements with job opportunities or increasing employment in small towns. This method does not take measures to alleviate the existing problems but it tries to prevent their

worsening through a reduction of the influx of migrants. Their results are not as visible as they can be perceived only in a long term perspective. Such an approach does not depend on the policies of the government.

Direct method however is much more visible as its actions are based on direct intervention in the areas concerned. The actions are generally applied to a specific area of a city. They can be divided in two kinds; eradication and relocation of the population of deprived neighborhoods and improvement and rehabilitation projects.

Methods of intervention

1) Indirect

- a) Redistribution of land
- b) New settlement with job opportunities
- c) Increase of employment opportunities in small towns

2) Direct

- a) Eradication and relocation of deprived areas
- b) Improvements and rehabilitation of deprived areas.

THE METHODOLOGY OF URBAN REGENERATION PROGRAMME

Urban regeneration programme attempts to rebuild the decayed areas of the urban center by feeding large amount of public fund and government power into the normal operation of the private market. (Dimuna & Omatsone 2010)

The programme works in a sequence, first a section of a city is designated as an urban regeneration area, and plans are drawn up and approved by local renewal

agency, the local government body and state agency. A public hearing is then held at which local renewal official, document their case for urban regeneration. At this point other citizens interested in the project have the opportunity to speak for or against it. Once the planning is completed, execution starts. Though some executions activities may be carried out simultaneously, there are six basic steps.

1) Land acquisition

The land and the building are usually acquired by negotiation with the owners, but if this fails, the regeneration authority will use the power of eminent domain to force the recalcitrant owners to sell; in case like this, the purchase is determine by independent appraisals.

2) Displacement and relocation

Individuals, families and businesses located in the area are forced to move and find homes or establish their business elsewhere. The law provides for some compensation and required renewal authorities to relocate them satisfactorily, although in practice this does not always happen.

3) Site clearance

The wrecked cranes and bulldozers demolish any building not considered useful by the regeneration authorities.

4) Site improvement and supporting facilities

The cleared land is usually improved by the construction of streets, servers, water mains, lighting systems, schools, libraries and parks

5) Disposition of improved land

The cleared and improved land can be sold, lease, donated or retained by the regeneration agency. Usually the land is sold to private persons either by competitive bidding or by negotiation between official of the agency and private investors.

6) New construction

The new construction may be residential, industrial, commercial or public. However, the eventual developer is usually obliged to build according to a general plan approved by the regeneration authorities.

This is usually the systemic operation of regeneration program that is dammed by some; praised by many and understood by few. The picture is often painted like this;

Before- dirty, dark, ugly slums

After- clean, bright, beautiful buildings.

The contrast is clear, the appeal seductive, but this picture shows only the hopes and wishes of urban regeneration. The realities of its costs and physiological consequences are drastically different.

CONCLUSION

Urban regeneration programme revitalize the urban environment. It's a task that must be accomplished to bring our urban environment to the standard appropriate to our time in Nigeria, the issue of urban regeneration has not yet been embraced thus a lot are to be accomplished yet. If other states will emulate and maintain the momentum used for a few successful programmes in Nigeria, such as the Akwa-Ibom plaza project and Abuja

experiences, urban decay will in no time become a matter of the past. Although there are well associated pains at the beginning of the exercise, the gains of the programme far outweigh the pains. At the completion of any regeneration project, the experiences have always been dramatic and exciting. Fresh and striking new homes, apartments, offices, shops or cultural institutions are known to have risen, where only a few years before were only disorder and decay.

Urban regeneration will give birth an attractive and aesthetically pleasing environment that would provide for us and future generation centers of delight. It fosters an improved socio-economic development and the living standard in urban and rural areas. Regeneration must be embraced so as to eradicate urban decay and understanding the major causes of urban decay will enhance its quick eradication since it will be nipped in the bud.

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