

# **An Evaluation of Factors that have Influenced Housing Policy Development in Uganda**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The development trends of Uganda's housing policy have been erratic right from the time before independence. However, much of the housing policy development can be ascribed to the colonial period. Under this era, the provision of public housing was found to be unsustainable, especially in the 1970s. In the late 1980s, Government of Uganda adopted the enabling approach as a strategy to improve housing conditions in the Country. This approach was the basis for formulating the National Shelter Strategy in 1992. Nonetheless, a number of challenges are still being experienced in the struggle to develop an appropriate housing policy for all citizens in the Country. The paper examines factors that have influenced housing policy development in Uganda since the colonial time to date based on politics, socio-economic environment and international interventions. This was done by analysing secondary data and interviewing key stakeholders. Findings revealed that, housing policies in Uganda have been changing basing on the political orientation of the day. Institutionalisation of the housing policy framework has not been realised in the country. Existing socio-economic environment in the country have also influenced housing policy formulation. The paper concludes with the recommendation of integrating and harmonising the various policies influencing housing development. It also advocates the development of a holistic policy for the housing sector while taking in consideration the peculiar circumstances of the housing delivery system in the country.

**Keywords:** housing provision, human settlements, policy development

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Uganda developed a National Shelter Strategy to enable policy framework to guide housing development in the country with the objective of providing decent and affordable shelter to its citizens. Despite this effort, housing policies in Uganda have failed to positively impact on housing development. As a result, many people in the country live in poor housing whose conditions are far from being decent and acceptable despite the country's commitment to improving the living conditions for its citizens (Mukiibi, 2008; Government of Uganda, 2007).

Internationally, housing policies have been used to try and address shelter problems, especially with respect to low-income earners, with the view of helping them access better shelter (Harris and Giles, 2003). These efforts can be traced in the evolution of housing policies internationally, and especially in the developing world. The evolution of housing policy in developing countries has been studied and identified in different ways. Some scholars have identified the following phases as stated by Harris and Giles (2003): the period of public housing provision (1945-1960s), sites-and-services (1972-1980s) and market enabling (1980s – present). However, Harris and Giles observe that this categorisation is more based on the policy recommendations that the international agencies recommended and less on policies that nations pursued.

In Uganda urban areas, are characterised by overcrowding, slum or informal settlement growth, housing shortage, poverty, unemployment and inadequate infrastructure services provision. In Kampala alone, it is estimated that sixty per cent of the city's official total

population of 1.20 million people lives in slums and informal settlements (UBOS, 2007). Sanitation provision is grossly deficient with most people having no access to a hygienic toilet and large amounts of faecal waste are discharged to the environment without adequate treatment having major impacts on infectious disease burden and quality of life (Hutton *et al.* 2007). It is against this background that the study sets out to examine factors that influence housing policy development in Uganda.

## **2.0 METHODOLOGY**

The paper examines factors that have influenced housing policy development in Uganda since the colonial time. The discourse gravitates around the political and socio-economic environment and their influence on the policy formulation process in the country, and the enabling approach that underpin the National Shelter Strategies (1992) to date. The paper draws insight mainly from secondary data, especially Government Acts, reports, national shelter documents and dissertation studies on housing in Uganda. The study augments information from secondary sources with primary data from interviews with officials from the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development.

## **3.0 THE DEVELOPMENT OF HOUSING POLICY IN UGANDA**

Housing policy development in Uganda has been influenced majorly by three factors: politics, socio-economic environment in the country and the international interventions. Hence, discussion is based on these three factors before and after independence.

### **3.1 Politics and Housing Policy**

#### *3.1.1 The Pre-Colonial Era*

Politics had almost no influence on housing policy development during this period. At that time, there were hardly any recognised towns or human settlements within Uganda and the country's population was small (less than 3 millions). The houses in existence were mainly simple homesteads developed by individual households. The country did not have a housing policy but rather the system of housing development was segmented, based on the cultural laws and norms of the various tribes and on the individual household's decision. In places where cultural leadership existed, a hierarchical structure in size of the dwellings was developed signifying the power structure of the time (Atkinson, 1950; Hailey, 1950).

#### *3.1.2 The Colonial period (1894 – 1962)*

The colonial era (1894-1962) is considered to be the period when efforts to establish a unified national housing policy in Uganda began, focusing on public housing for civil servants (Ouma, 1991). Planned urban housing, with modern, materials, service and facilities was introduced and segregated housing, based on race, became part of urban planning in the country. Whereas this had the positive effect of improving the housing environment, it also resulted in exclusively focusing on public housing in urban areas while neglecting private housing.

#### *3.1.3 The Segregation policy and migrant labour force*

The colonial administration used the policy of segregation of races, whereby urban centres had areas for the whites, "coloured" and Africans. Africans were migrant workers in urban areas under restrictive conditions. The British used the policy of indirect rule to administer colonies from urban centres. These policies had two main aims of developing centres in which non-Africans could live in healthy surroundings; and limiting the trading activities of non-Africans in order to protect the way of life, land and trade of the indigenous peoples (Colonial Office, 1955). It was also argued that East African territories were unhealthy for Europeans and hence, centres had to be established where they [Europeans] could live free from dangers of tropical diseases and from which the surrounding countryside could be administered (*ibid*, 1955). As these policies were based on the aforementioned premise, they only managed to influence urban housing, a trend that has continued to date in Uganda.

### *3.1.4 The Development of public housing*

The development of public housing started in the early days of colonising the country, except that this type of housing was restricted to the colonial administrators. The Local Government (Municipalities) Ordinance of 1947 gave power to the colonial government to create municipal councils and boards. This led to the formation of Kampala Municipal Council (Colonial Office, 1950). Public servants, mainly administrators, were assisted with housing supplied by government. The development of public housing stemmed from the need to house overseas administrators who were running the country on behalf of the colonial government. In the opinion of the colonial authorities, differences in living modes and cultures also served to reinforce the need to develop separate accommodation for the foreign authorities within designated areas. Being foreigners from a more developed country, the colonial authorities had to create a favourable living environment for their administrators. This resulted in the genesis of Public Housing for civil servants in Uganda (Ouma, 1991).

To develop residential and administrative quarters for their activities, foreign administrators chose the best sites based on a number of attributes such as altitude (for cooler environment and view), convenience of location, attractive scenery. Another reason for locating housing for the foreign administrators at high altitude was the fear of malaria. Initially the disease was found mainly below 1,500 m, and it was thought to be caused by “miasma” – the bad air or gas found in swamps (Curtin, 1985). The houses were located in designated and well-planned locations, with secure and healthy environment. All this was done to make the new environment the foreign administrators were working in to be as close as possible to the one they had in their home countries.

Public housing for local civil servants came late after pressure from them could not be ignored any more. In 1943 Colonial housing policies were set out, pronouncing themselves on the planning of housing and on the provision of building materials, and suggesting ways in which housing could be assisted under the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts. In 1948 a Superintending Engineer (African Housing), in the Public Works Department of Uganda, was appointed and, in 1949, an African Housing Committee was established under a Development Commissioner to oversee the implementation of policies on African housing. This led to the construction of a number of housing estates for different categories of public servants in the country (Ouma, 1991).

### *3.1.5 The Immediate post colonial era (1962 and 1970)*

With the removal of restrictions to movement and settling in urban areas, after the achievement of independence, more indigenes migrated to the forming urban centres. In the desire to enable Africans to have access to urban services, the post-colonial government made a number of changes while continuing with the provision of public housing in urban areas. Revisions were made on the Urban Authorities Act, 1958 and it was amended leading to the Urban Authorities Act, 1964. In addition, in the same year, the Public Health Act, 1964 and Town and Country Planning Act, 1964 were enacted.

The Urban Authorities Act 1958 and the Urban Authorities Act, 1964 exemplified the dualistic characteristic of Kampala whereby the Europeans and coloured lived in planned areas while the Africans lived in unplanned areas of Kampala. In the process, urban authorities were empowered to undertake and be responsible for the development of urban plans, without adequate guidance, capacity building and funding. Unfortunately, the acts were developed based on the town planning laws of Britain which are not appropriate for Uganda’s environment. In essence, the Act, involved preparation of physical plans and regulations on land use, social infrastructure provision through the organs of the central government, without a participatory planning process and fiscal transfers to enable local authorities and communities to identify, prioritise, plan, implement, commission, operate and maintain the services, investments created in a sustainable way. These unrealistic policies resulted in

unprecedented population growth and undue pressure on infrastructure supply and housing. Thus, urban centres developed without adequate guidance (Mukwaya, 2004).

Although later, Government of Uganda adopted decentralisation and enacted the Local Government Act, 1997, some sections of the two acts conflict and attempts to revise the former have so far not been successful. For example, while the local governments are mandated by the 1997 Act to plan for their areas, the Town and Country Planning Act, 1964 stipulates otherwise, thereby causing conflict between the two acts. This has resulted in negative influence on the development of urban housing.

#### *3.1.6 The Military Rule (1971 and 1986)*

The period 1971-1986 saw no significant housing development in the country (Government of Uganda, 1992b). Instead the existing stock underwent deterioration owing to overcrowding and lack of maintenance. Significant deterioration was most noticeable in urban low-income settlements. Between 1979 and 1986 the country's leadership was changed four times. The effects of tribalism and military threats continued to haunt the country and led to the civil war that broke out in 1981. Views and suggestions by the technical personnel of government became irrelevant to decision-makers. Under such an environment, ministries concerned with housing were neglected, a phenomenon that has been carried on up to today.

#### *3.1.7 The post military rule (1986 to 1991)*

Between late 1980s and 1990s urban housing experienced some little growth. The country saw relative stability in many areas, and there was a new ray of hope in rejuvenating the country's economy. However, there was an increase in rural-urban migration as rural incomes depreciated and the search for urban jobs intensified. Housing development also suffered lack of guidance especially in terms of planning, standards and quality assurance. The resultant urban sprawl in areas such as Kampala took on a more distinctive and informal character (Mukiibi, 2008).

### **3.2 International influence - The enabling approach (1992 to date)**

In 1992, Uganda embarked on and developed a National Shelter Strategy. Uganda was one of the six countries that were identified by the United Nations for preparation of the Shelter Strategies from which other countries would learn when preparing their own. The Shelter Strategies were prepared within the enabling policy framework, with the view of allowing government to facilitate individual households and private suppliers to play a prominent role in the development of the housing sub-sector (Government of Uganda, 1992a: 1992b). Uganda Government committed itself to providing affordable shelter and to improving the quality of life of its citizens through the implementation of the Shelter Strategy using the enabling approach. Under this commitment Government would have to shoulder the responsibility of creating an environment in which households, NGOs and Community Groups can operate effectively and efficiently and thus be in a position to provide decent, affordable shelter as well as promoting social development and improving the quality of life (Government of Uganda, 1992a). Despite the adoption of the enabling approach, improvement in the provision of decent shelter to many in the country has not been realised as government has not prioritised institutionalisation of enabling framework.

### **3.3 Socio-economic environment and housing policy**

The development of housing policy in Uganda has also had its influence arising out of the economic policies of the time. When the British came to East Africa, they were driven by economic motives and because of the climate that they found, that was favourable for agriculture, they decided to become permanent settlers. This later had an influence on the land and housing policies they pursued in the region. They, therefore, opted for the plantation system of agricultural exploitation of East Africa (Padmore, 1931).

### 3.3.1 *Controlled African urban housing*

In Uganda, the migrant labour force was exploited in the urban environment under similar conditions as industrial labour force, and in the construction industry as unskilled human resource. Other family members of the migrant labour workers indirectly provided farm labour through imposition of taxes. Those who were in rural areas were made to work on farms to produce cash crops such as cotton, coffee, and tea. Under this background the development of African housing in Uganda remained neglected and hardly benefited from modern regulations and policies of the time.

By the 1950s, already scanty groups of Africans had started forming isolated informal settlements in and around towns such as Kampala and Jinja (Government of Uganda, 1954). These informal settlement dwellers formed the nucleus of the urban labour force of the time. It was envisaged that there would emerge a new social pattern among the urban Africans and, because of this, there was a need to guide the development to meet the required health and building standards. The colonial government consequently developed the system of checking the migration of Africans from rural areas to avoid possible spread of local diseases to the few foreigners and overwhelming the limited housing provided. Africans were hence tolerated in urban areas only as labour force (Andreasen, 1996).

To control migration to towns, employees were allowed to reside in towns exclusive of their family members. African men were considered as guest workers whose sole function in the urban environment was to contribute to the labour force. Other members of their families were expected to remain in the village and work on farms. With this in mind, housing provided for the migrant workers took on a temporary character. Migrant workers were housed in simple, single rooms of about 9 m<sup>2</sup> to 12 m<sup>2</sup> then known as bachelors' quarters (Mukiibi, 2008). The provision of bachelors' quarters later had the influence on the type of housing that is common today among low-income earners in Uganda. On the other hand, the colonial houses of the whites were often large, yet the occupants had small families.

Being interested in controlling the movement of the indigenes to town, while at the same time taking advantage of their labour, necessitated the formation of a Department of African Housing, in 1954, responsible for overseeing the development of urban housing for the African labour force. The document, 'African Housing' was the first policy statement of the colonial government about housing for the indigenes in Uganda. The objectives of the African Housing Department were, among others; to build houses in urban centres for both low- and middle-income African families, and to advise, assist and encourage other agencies that were involved in the development of housing (Piloy, 1996).

### 3.3.2 *Private housing*

During the British colonial administration, private housing was left to individual households' effort. The same trend of housing development that existed in the pre-colonial time continued in the colonial era in most of the countryside. In urban areas, in quest to meet the urban planning and building regulations, private higher income developers built housing similar to that of the Europeans, and the house evolved from the mud-and-wattle round shape and took on a rectangular shape, built of 'permanent' materials. The internal space division and use also emulated the arrangement of the foreign type of housing constructed by the Europeans and Indians.

## 4.0 CONCLUSIONS

From this study, it is evident that housing policy development in Uganda has been influenced by a number of factors, categorised under politics, socio-economic environment and international interventions. Housing policies in Uganda have been changing basing on the politics of the day. Unstable politics in the country has led to neglect of private housing development in the country and housing development has not been given due recognition,

leaving it to an unguided private sector. Institutionalising the housing policy framework has not been realised in the country leading to poor performance of the enabling approach.

Existing socio-economic environment in the country has also influenced housing policy formulation. Housing development faces challenges related to urban poverty, urban crime, environmental degradation, inadequate housing, corruption, and lack of comprehensive policies to facilitate holistic planning and development.

The concept of the enabling approach has had limited success in Uganda because of its poor implementation. Government of Uganda has played a limited role in the development of the country's housing market. While Government is expected to play a leading role in promoting social development, affordable housing and improved quality of life for all its citizens major benefits of this enabling approach in the country are yet to be established. Despite realizing the need to have a national housing policy to specifically address housing issues in Uganda, to date that policy has not been enacted and implementation of the National Shelter Strategy has only been partially effected. Government efforts to create an enabling approach for various stakeholders to contribute positively to housing development in the country have been limited, ill-prepared and, in some cases, frustrated by contradictory policies.

Under the prevailing circumstances, Government should harmonise and integrate all contradictory, fragmented and unrealistic policies related to housing. While benchmarking international experiences, government should also develop a realistic and holistic housing policy, taking in consideration the politics and socio-economic environment peculiar to the housing delivery system in the country.

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