The Impact of Rent Levies on Management and Maintenance of Local Authority Housing in Kisumu Municipal Council

By

Wagah George Godwin

The quality of Housing has become a matter of serious concern to developing countries like Kenya, which are facing colossal problem of improvement of housing conditions. Capital investment in the built environment within an urban area is very expensive. This colossal sum of capital therefore requires huge investment to maintain so as to realize functional, financial and aesthetic role of the asset.

There is a general acceptance that building and infrastructure are a pre-requisite to national economic growth and their maintenance will ensure that assets survive their life service. However, there are several constraints which have led to unsatisfactory levels of maintenance with the following manifestations, leaking roofs and taps, blocked sewage, falling fences, broken and missing window panes, defective floors and walls, potholes in driveways and defective sanitary appliances. Poor management of housing estates would in the first instance lead to loss in housing stock through rapid decay and deterioration of the structure and its surrounding. Such a state not only worsens the housing shortage but also involves loss of capital and revenue. Other symptoms include, unhealthy residential environments, spiraling rates of rents, congestions. With the current shortage of housing especially in the major urban centers in Kenya, the existing housing stock is as important, if not more important than the newly constructed housing. In this context therefore, timely maintenance and rehabilitation work assumes a special significance as inadequate attention to this area could accelerate depreciation of building stock, ultimately leading to Considerable loss of national assets. The housing - agencies therefore have to ensure effective control on maintenance costs and look for innovative means of cost recovery.

Housing once constructed is believed to be self-supporting. Part of the rent collected could be recouped for maintenance. Local Authority Housing is generally charged far below the market rent (at times as low as 25 per cent of the market rent). This has sometimes encouraged "over consumption" of housing and has led to a reduction in household mobility which has undesirable effect on labour market. The failure to charge realistic prices which would reflect the cost of operation, maintenance and long term capita has partly contributed to low funds available for the maintenance of the various infrastructural services within respective local authorities and little incentive to undertake further investment in it. It is also possible that where building maintenance is considered less important to say the provision of new housing, fewer resources in form of staffing, equipment and material will be made available for maintenance, resulting to rapid deterioration or dilapidation of the building stock.

Buildings begin to deteriorate immediately after completion and therefore the amount of maintenance to be undertaken increases with age of the structure. While preventive maintenance requires cheap availability of resources, many urban authorities always cite lack of sufficient funds, as a constraint to respond to maintenance requests. The councils have been accused of providing very poor services while charging rates in some areas not even rendering the services at all.

The paper therefore attempts to present the predominant defective elements of the building fabric, assessment of maintenance problems of council estates, urban authority maintenance practices and finally propose better management and maintenance techniques. This is in view of the fact that funds are in short supply and maintenance should not be carried cut on ad hoc basis.