

Residents' Perception of Subsidised Low-income Housing in South Africa: A Case Study of Kliptown, Johannesburg

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ABSTRACT This paper presents findings on the perception of low-income housing occupants on the quality of houses that have been built through the South Africa National Housing Subsidy Scheme Programme in Kliptown, Johannesburg, South Africa. The study also looks at the expectations of the occupants of the RDP houses prior to when the houses were allocated to them; if they were met by the houses provided. A structured questionnaire survey was conducted in Kliptown, Soweto in Johannesburg to determine the objective of the study. The respondents involved in the data gathering were only housing subsidy beneficiaries. The survey results revealed that the expectations of the occupants in terms of their housing needs were not met. Further findings also revealed that most of the houses had defects, the extents of which mere repairs by the occupants cannot handle. Also, the occupants indicated that the houses were not of good quality. Housing subsidy occupants' perception has not been widely explored even though it is generally accepted that the quality of the South Africa subsidised houses is of low quality. Post- occupancy evaluation and prior and post-consultation with the occupants is as important as the houses being delivered. The paper contributes to this body of knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

The post-democratic government of the new South African state has since 1994 committed itself to urban reconstruction and development programmes to alleviate the plight of the low-income group, the poor and the disadvantaged group. This is clearly evident in the two major macro-development strategies developed after 1994 - the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) being the main development instrument and the Growth, Economic and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR) enacted in 1996, which was a follow-up document to correct lapses in the RDP document. The RDP is directed at addressing the social aspects of sustainable development by meeting the basic needs of people and encouraging people-driven processes. While GEAR, the country's main economic strategy attempts to address issues of economic inequity, as well as the country's continued economic growth. However, a basic ideology in both documents is the issue of housing as this is regarded as a constitutional right of every South African and as such ways to enhance its delivery are encouraged in both documents. Besides, most of the influential planning and developmental policy documents advocate integrated de-

velopment and greater equity with regards to housing provision.

When comparing the change in the housing situation in South Africa from 1994 to date, there is a significant increase, surpassing the previous rates in the last four decades preceding the new South African State. Despite this stabilization and increase in housing rate, perceptions are that the constructed houses are of very low quality and do not meet the need of the occupants. Since 1994, the low-cost housing program has mostly involved building serviced townships on urban peripheries, which in itself presents a myriad of environmental, social and political concerns (Burgoyne 2008). Despite this social problem, by the end of 2011, government had given out 3.0 million houses, giving shelter to more than 13.5 million people, free of charge according to the South African National Department of Human Settlement. However, many problems with the process have become clear as the housing programmes have unfolded. Notable amongst these include (Jenkins 1999):

1. new houses and infrastructure are of poor quality, and are rapidly deteriorating and require maintenance;
2. new houses and Human Settlement development continue placing the poor and low-income blacks in 'ghettos' on

- urban peripheries, far from jobs and services;
3. people dislike the model of housing used, and would prefer larger houses (main model was first changed in 1998 when the then Department of Housing, now the Department of Human Settlement increased the minimum size of new houses to 30m², and was further increased in 2004 during the launching of the Breaking New Ground Policy to 40m²);
 4. the dominant model of free-hold tenure inadequately deals with the dynamics of poverty, and several categories of the poor, such as temporary workers and many women, which would be better served by rental accommodation as against giving of houses;
 5. because of these problems, people often sell or rent out their RDP houses bought through the subsidy, and move back to squatter or other informal settlements closer to their economic activities; and
 6. environmental concerns regarding the new developments include increases in vehicular traffic caused by urban sprawl and land use changes.

Likewise, others studies (Aigbavboa 2010; Charlton 2009; Charlton and Kihato 2006; Ogunfiditimi 2007) have shown that most beneficiaries of the houses emanating from the government housing subsidy schemes are not always satisfied with the conditions of their houses. Therefore the objective of this study is to present findings on the perception of the low-income housing occupants on the quality of houses that have been built under the Housing Subsidy Scheme Programme in Klip-town, Johannesburg, South Africa. The study also looks at the expectations of the occupants prior to when the houses were allocated to them; if they were met by the houses provided. The paper starts with an overview of the literature on housing quality, and then presents the results of the analysis and findings of the research. Finally, the paper draws some conclusions and makes some recommendations.

Housing Quality

Present trends in housing research shows that there is an increasing interest in the study

of occupants' perception of housing quality and their housing environment and how it affects their wellbeing and way of life. Mohit et al. (2010) informs that the assessment of housing quality has become an important aspect of housing provisioning in developed countries like the UK and USA. The concept of quality housing has been discussed extensively by various scholars (Charlton 2009; Mkuzo 2011). It has also received important consideration by the United Nations through its series of seminars on the social aspects of housing through the use of different terms such as 'suitable', 'adequate', 'standard', or 'good' housing. Since it is impossible to come to a generally agreed universal definition of 'good' or 'quality' housing, it is generally agreed that 'good' or 'quality' housing should satisfy the occupants needs at any given stage of development. Likewise, the American Public Housing Association (1964) cited in Onibokun (1985) states that for a shelter to be rated 'adequate' or 'quality' housing, it must be habitable, affordable and performs a four-fold function of meeting occupants' physiological and psychological needs as well as protecting them against infections and accidents. Hence, Onibokun (1985) concludes that 'good' or 'quality' housing encompasses the structure and internal adequacies of dwelling units, availability of amenities, occupancy rate, neighbourhood conditions, and habitability of housing. Also, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights used seven criteria, namely: legal security of tenure, affordability, habitability, accessibility, location and availability of services and cultural identity to clarify what 'good' or 'quality' or 'adequate' housing means (Thiele 2002). Similarly at the 2nd HABITAT Conference in Istanbul in 1996, United Nations Member States defined 'quality' or 'adequate' housing in the following terms (UN-Habitat 2006):

Adequate shelter means adequate privacy; adequate space; physical accessibility; adequate security; security of tenure; structural stability and durability; adequate lighting, heating and ventilation; adequate basic infrastructure, such as water supply sanitation and waste-management facilities; suitable environmental quality and health-related factors; and adequate and accessible location with regard to work and basic facilities: all of

which should be available at an affordable cost. Adequacy often varies from country to country, since it depends on specific cultural, social, environmental and economic factors.

According to Zubairu (2002), quality housing has some key attributes of decency, security, privacy, spacious, healthy, affordable, legally secured tenure, habitable, accessible, and appropriately located with services and infrastructure. These attributes, Bonnefoy (2007) submits are fundamental in promoting healthy housing, better living conditions, and contribute to physical and psychological wellbeing and at the same time support the development and social integration of individuals and community. From the above, it can be summarized that quality housing describes housing attributes that are fundamental in meeting the physiological, psychological, health and security needs of occupants. As such, housing quality has been differently defined because of its different attributes or the extent of the housing problem in a given community. Hence, we can refer to housing quality in the present context, as the habitability level of the subsidised houses given to the residents of Kliptown in Soweto, South Africa.

Historical Background of Kliptown – Johannesburg

Kliptown is a suburb and a unique South African habitat of the formerly Black township of Soweto in Johannesburg, Gauteng Province, located about 17 km south-west of Johannesburg. The population of Kliptown is between 38,000 and 45,000 according to the City of Johannesburg. Kliptown is the oldest residential district of Soweto, and was first laid out in 1891 on land which formed part of Klipspruit farm. The farm was named after the Klipspruit - rocky stream that runs nearby. Since 1903 the area has been home to informal settlements (squatter camps). Presently, the area contains a mixture of purpose-built housing and a large number of shacks and other informal homes. Until 1990 Kliptown was located outside Johannesburg municipal area and the apartheid laws and regulations were not strictly applied to the area. All of Kliptown during the old government was administered by the Peri-Urban Health Board. Kliptown became famous since June 1955 when it

became the home of the Freedom Charter. About 3000 delegates gathered there to adopt the manifesto of the people's aspirations against racial hatred and discrimination.

Kliptown was the first known Black peri-suburb where Black people could own properties in Johannesburg. Currently, housing is tops of the agenda in Kliptown as the entire settlement has not been adequately catered for by the post-apartheid government. However, since 1994, houses have been constructed in Kliptown to alleviate the poor housing situation of the residence. A typical house built in Kliptown under the Reconstruction and Development (RDP) Housing Plan has an area of 36m² and is located on a 250m² plots. Most of the units consist of an open-plan bedroom, lounge and kitchen, with a separate lavatory. In general, these homes are built with brick and mortar with galvanized iron roofs, metal doors and usually two or three small windows. It should be noted that not all RDP homes are the same in South and even in Kliptown; some are bigger and can measure up to 45m².

METHODOLOGY

The data used in this paper were derived from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data was obtained through the survey method, while the secondary data was derived from the review of literature and archival records. The primary data was collected through a structured occupant survey. Structured questionnaire was used to conduct interviews with 50 low-income housing beneficiaries at Kliptown RDP housing subsidy locations in Johannesburg, Gauteng Province of South Africa. These households had all benefited from the government housing subsidy scheme. The questionnaire was administered to the head of households or their spouses. One household head per house was engaged in the interview/questionnaire administration. Beneficiaries were randomly selected from areas visited; these were interviewed based on the fact that they have been resident in the areas for more than a month and likewise the houses have been allocated to them for more than one month. All households from each location had an equal chance to be drawn and to occur in the sample. All com-

pleted and allocated subsidised housing units were chosen as the sample frame. A total of 50 households were chosen in the entire location for the research, making the overall sample size to be 50 households. This was achieved as follows: each location was divided into 10 regions using the streets, with each region containing 205 houses. A systematic sampling was then applied through the selection of every 20th house in each region; for easy identification of the 20th house, house numbers were used to calculate the number of the next 20th house. This process was essential to obtain true representation of the entire sample. Out of the 50 questionnaires sent out, all 50 were returned representing a 100% response rate. Also, a physical observation of the housing units was made, while pictures of the interiors and exteriors of the houses were taken (pictures not shown on this paper). The next section presents the findings of the study and a discussion of the result. Below is a brief indication of what the key quality concerns are.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 shows the length of stay of the beneficiaries in the housing units. About 56.20% of the respondents have been living in the subsidised housing unit between 3-5 years. Those who have lived there for more than five years are 5.70% while 2-3 years is 35.20%. In essence beneficiaries who have lived in their housing units (Kliptown) for more than one year completed the questionnaires. It can therefore be inferred that the respondents have adequate knowledge of their living apartments and out-door environment,

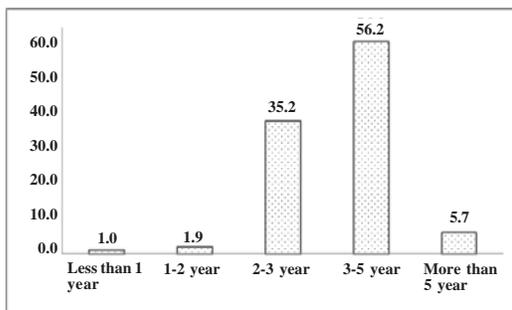


Fig. 1. Length of stay in housing unit

hence their perceptions about the houses quality will be a useful notion to inform the DHS.

Figure 2 shows the beneficiaries' intended duration of stay beyond what has already be reported in Figure 1. About 43.60% indicated that they intend to live in the housing units for more than five years while 20.60% indicated they intend to live in the house for less than one year. This further confirms that the occupant's responses in the housing quality perception survey are based on a genuine motive, because they all seek the good of the living apartment and environment.

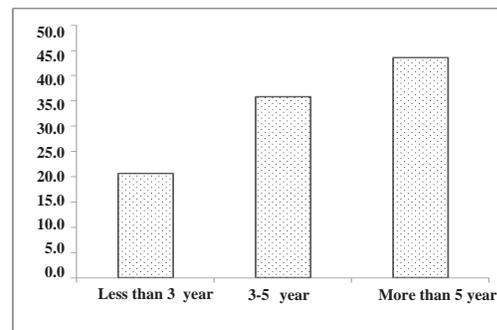


Fig. 2. Intended duration of stay in housing unit

Furthermore, when the beneficiaries were asked of their perception with regards to the building materials quality standard, 52.0% indicated that it was very poor, while 20.0% informed it was good as shown in Figure 3. This was very subjective as most of the beneficiaries interviewed will not have the requisite knowledge of building materials science. With the presence and active voice of the South African Bureau of Standards (SABS), which oversees the quality of building material in the country, together with the Housing Consumer Protection Trust, that offers legal advice on all aspects of low-cost housing and the National Home Builders Registration Council (NHBRC) which protects the interests of all housing consumers and regulates the home building industry, the problem of poor quality building materials should not arise. Hence when the beneficiaries were further asked of their perception of the building workmanship standard, the survey result revealed that 44.0% indicated that it was very poor while 32.0% said that it was good.

The result for this question as shown in Figure 3 was in contrast to the earlier question on the building materials quality, which thus revealed that beneficiaries earlier response to the quality of materials were directed at the workmanship and not materials. The result corresponds with the findings of the study by Ogunfiditimi (2007) where 34.6% of the respondents in that study indicated that the building workmanship was poor while 21.3% revealed that the workmanship was good. However, the finding from the same study is in disparity with the present with regards to the beneficiaries' perception of the building materials quality. Ogunfiditimi's (2007) findings revealed that 14.8% respondent judged the material quality to be very poor, while 36.3% indicated that it was very good. When a building workmanship is poor, defects are inevitable in the building.

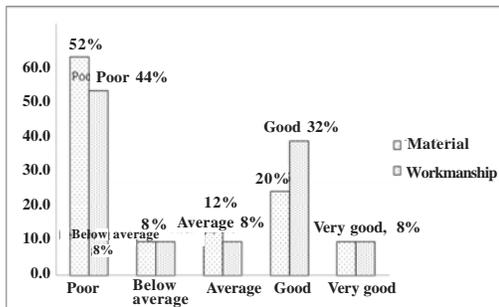


Fig. 3. Building materials quality and workmanship standard

Therefore when beneficiaries were asked if they have noticed any defects in their housing units, 72.0% said yes, while, 28.5% said no. When they were further asked when they first noticed the defect, 64.0% indicated that they first noticed it within 1-3 years of living in the houses, while 8.0% indicated 4-6 years and 28.0% saying they have not noticed any. This corresponds to the earlier findings of the respondents that have not notice any defects in their houses.

When the beneficiaries were further asked which part of the building the defects were noticed on a separate count based on the total number of the beneficiaries, it was revealed that; the floor (24.0%), walls (56.0%), doors (52.0%), windows (52.0%), roof (60.0%), ceil-

ing (95.0%) and plumbing (8.0%) were defect-ed as shown in Figure 4.

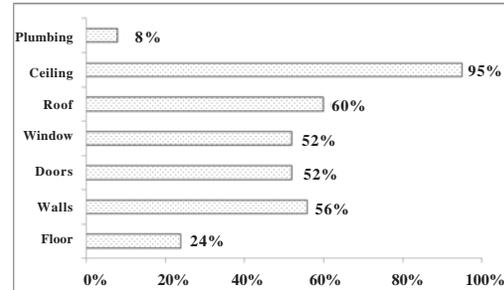


Fig. 4. Parts of building with defects

When beneficiaries were also asked the types of defects that had been observed in these areas, 24.0% of the respondents as shown in Figure 4 revealed that the floors were not finished which makes the wooden doors to be infested. The roofs also were not firmly secured to the walls and/or trusses, causing them to rattle, or even blow off, when windy, hence beneficiaries placed stones and tyres on the roofs to further prevent this.

Also, the roofs leak when it rains; cracks on the walls were a major problem to the beneficiaries of which they attested that these developed soon after they move in, particularly around the windows, doors and corners. Doors did not fit securely into their frames and they had to stuff materials along the frames, to stop the water from coming in when it rains. From the physical observation of the doors, the researcher observed that the doors were not varnished; some beneficiaries had covered their doors with plastic to keep them waterproof. Also, some doors had gaps between the wooden slats which were wide enough to see through. Also, in the houses that had sanitary fittings installed, the beneficiaries revealed that there is a common problem of pipe leakages and low pressure from the water closet cistern. For the windows, there were gaps between the window frames and the wall, metal frames were rusted and some windows do not close properly. Physical observation and general complains about the ceiling revealed that most houses did not have ceilings, which greatly affect the occupants satisfaction levels with the units. Hence, they informed that the houses were very cold

during the winter seasons and hot during the summers. The research findings agree with that of Nobrega (2007) in a study of the subsidised housing units in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, Ogunfiditimi (2007), Aigbavboa (2010), and Aigbavboa and Thwala (2011). Also, the present findings in Kliptown concurs with the work of Mkuzo (2011), who found that the beneficiaries of a housing project in Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality had problems with cracks on the walls, poor plumbing and doors not properly fitted. Overall, 78.0% of the respondent in that study rated the housing quality very poor while 10.0% of the respondents were very dissatisfied with the housing units they had received. While 12.0% in the study were neutral, informing that 'they are happy and thankful to have received houses for free'.

When the beneficiaries' perception was assessed on the overall quality of the housing units received, 52.0% respondents revealed that the houses were not of good quality, while, 36.0% indicated that it was of good quality. A further 12.0% indicated they were not sure if it was good or bad. The beneficiaries' response can be attributed to the fact that 44.0% of them had not been able to carry out any repairs to the defects, while 28.0% had been able to attend to some defects which ranged from the waterproofing of roof sheets where possible, closing of gaps to doors and windows; fixing of locks and flooring of the unfinished floors.

When the beneficiaries were asked about their expectations before the units were allocated to them; findings revealed that beneficiaries' expectation for bigger housing units (60.00%), structure with quality finish (92.00%), bigger plots (84.00%) and units with good sanitary systems (88.00%) were not met. However, 80.0% of the respondents indicated that their expectation of a housing unit with improved living condition from shacks was met. Likewise, 76.00% said they now live in clean environment compared to where they were coming from, as some of them indicated that they were previously living in shacks (slums housing). A general complaint in the studies that have evaluated houses built through the South Africa housing subsidy schemes all revealed that there is a general dissatisfaction with the size and quality of the units (Charlton and Kihato 2006; Mkuzo 2011; Nobrega 2007; Ogunfiditimi 2007). This prob-

lem is primarily due to the non-assessment of the occupants need before the present housing model was adopted. Even when the problem became very obvious, the Department of Human Settlement (DHS) is yet to fully incorporate occupants' needs assessment in the development of new housing projects. From the above, it can be concluded that the DHS did not succeeded in meeting the housing needs and expectations of the beneficiaries. But from the basic expectation of improved living conditions from shack and clean environment, it can be concluded that the beneficiaries are thus satisfied with the overall housing condition even though most of their expectations were not met.

This thus necessitates the question of how sufficient it is to judge the success of a given housing project or scheme with the quality of the building alone. This is because one of the fundamental tenets of owning a house is to improve the quality of life (QoL) of the inhabitants which the current housing subsidy scheme evaluated has succeeded in doing. Despite an improvement in the QoL of the beneficiaries, housing is also supposed to meet the minimum standard of quality, workmanship and aesthetics which the housing units provided to some occupants of Kliptown in Soweto, Johannesburg, South Africa had not met.

CONCLUSION

This paper examined the perception of low-income housing occupants towards the quality of houses that has been built through the Housing Subsidy Scheme Programme in Kliptown, Johannesburg. Findings revealed that most of the respondents were not satisfied with the building materials quality and the workmanship standard of the housing units. Also, the respondents indicated that the floors, walls, doors, windows, roofs, ceilings and plumbing were defective.

This implies that there is a general dissatisfaction with the quality of the subsidised housing units in Kliptown. Furthermore, the paper also investigated the expectations of the occupants of the RDP houses, if they were met by the houses provided.

Findings revealed that beneficiaries' expectation for bigger housing units, structure with quality finish, bigger plots and units with good sanitary systems were not met. However, re-

spondents indicated that their expectation of a housing unit with improved living condition from shacks was met. Although the empirical study is based on a relatively small sample of residents of low-income housing in Kliptown, the findings provide an insight into the general perception of the building quality and needs met by the government subsidised housing units.

Findings in this study are of vast policy implications. First, it is clear from the result that the housing unit quality was a major problem to the occupants. The policy implication is that future construction of public housing should be responsive to occupants' need for adequate quality such as in safety, security, thermal comfort and adequate sleeping area. Also, the housing units should be a means to empower the occupants to gain economic freedom. To this end, the workmanship level and supervision of the housing unit during construction should be taken serious by the DHS.

Another policy implication is that the present model of public housing provision that delivers 40m² units should be revised to cater for the need of households with larger family size; as the study revealed that the occupants need for bigger housing units was not met. It is therefore suggested that a thorough needs assessments of the occupants in any area to be provided with housing units should studied.

Lastly, findings from the research revealed that the progressive realisation of the right to 'adequate' housing as contained in the South Africa constitution is being met by the government. This is because a majority of the beneficiaries informed that their quality of life has increase. Also the provided houses have given them an improved living condition and they now live in cleaner environment. Hence the DHS objective of the broader housing vision in promoting social cohesion and improving quality of life for the poor is being achieved as findings has showed.

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