

Validating RDP Housing Beneficiaries' Perceptions on the Quality of Their Houses: The Case of RDP Golf Course Study, Eastern Cape

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ABSTRACT The study sought to validate the RDP housing beneficiaries' perceptions on the quality of their houses. The study was explorative, explanatory and descriptive in design; and triangulated both qualitative and quantitative approaches with the qualitative approach being the dominant approach and quantitative being the less dominant. The study utilized an interview guide with unstructured questions as a data collection tool to guide the conduction of in-depth interviews with the study participants; while a mini-survey questionnaire with likert designed questions was used to solicit the magnitude of the perceptions of the study respondents on the extent of the quality of the houses. The following perceptions were raised by most of the study participants: poor quality roofing; poor quality doors; cracking floors; weak and poor quality toilets. The researchers informed by these findings advocate for the government to work towards renovation of these houses to ensure that the people reside in qualitative RDP houses.

INTRODUCTION

Internationally, a house is regarded as one with more than one wall which is adequate for more than four people to reside (UN HABITAT 2009). It is generally expected to be of good quality to protect and promote the health of those who are residing in those houses (UN HABITAT 2009). Access to adequate and quality housing is also affirmed and respected as a human right for everyone globally, South Africa included (UNHDR 1948; Republic of South Africa (RSA) 1996). To this end, many governments around the globe have ratified and have enacted their countries' specific rights as part of legislation towards the observation and promotion of this inalienable right. It is, however, disheartening to hear that close to 2 billion globally continue to live in shanty or squalor dwellings; or in conditions of severe shelter deprivations (UN HABITAT 2003). It also depicts that the governments as custodians of these rights are either not doing enough to address this housing problem or the policies are not being properly penned and pegged. This calls for an investigation to unearth the stark reality of what is taking place. To this end, South Africa faces a serious shortage of housing coupled with phenomenal growth of shanties and backyard dwellings on either formal structures or informal structures (Phago

2010; Shapurjee and Charlton 2013). Agreeably, this state of housing problem was inherited from the apartheid era when most black South Africans were deterred from owning proper housing, but were instead settled in overcrowded reserves with poor quality houses (Patel 2005). It is against this background that the Post 1994 Apartheid South African government sought to redress these imbalances by instituting empowering and democratic policies and programs such as the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) of 1994, Growth Employment and Redistribution Program (GEAR) and other policies such as WHITE PAPERS for various development endeavours (White Paper for Social Development 1997). All these served to reinforce and create a room for dialogue with the country to make the policy known to the country. The RDP housing program was instituted to provide the South Africans with qualitative housing that meets their basic needs. Qualitative housing is important to provide people with safe and comfortable houses with ample space, both inside and in the compound (Republic of South Africa 1994). This has, however, not been the case with the RDP houses on the ground as many complaints raised against them indicate that these houses are not adequate, are of poor quality and, therefore, defeats some of the objectives of the RDP program.

Problem Statement

It has become the interest and mandate of many governments worldwide to provide their people with qualitative and adequate housing that meets their needs and expectations; as well as normative and conventional quality. This is all in response to the aggravating and dehumanizing circumstances that most people are residing in. It is one of the reasons why many housing programs were instituted upon and are being implemented in South Africa. This article is motivated by the numerous complaints raised against the quality of the Golf course RDP houses in South Africa (Chakuwamba 2010; Lemanski 2010; Manomano 2013). It therefore serves as an instrument to display the perceptions of the housing beneficiaries on the quality of their houses.

Aims and Objectives

Although the broad research study from which this article is derived from sought to explore the perceptions of the beneficiaries on the extent to which the RDP houses meet their needs, the aim and objective of this study is to explore the perceptions and perceptible levels of the beneficiaries on the quality of the RDP houses.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

The design was explorative, explanatory and descriptive in nature and used a triangulation of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative approach enabled the researchers to determine the feelings, attitudes, opinions and views of the participants; while the quantitative approach enabled the researcher to get the magnitude of the respondents on the quality of the RDP houses in the Golf Course area of Alice town, Eastern Cape Province. The use of both these methods increased the result's reliability and validity (Rubin and Babbie 2008). The qualitative approach took the form of a case study while the quantitative approach took the form of a mini survey.

Research Instruments

The study utilized an interview guide as a data collection tool with unstructured questions to collect qualitative data; while a likert scale

designed questionnaire was used to collect the perceptions of the beneficiaries on these RDP houses (Neuman 2006; Rubin and Babbie 2008).

Methods of Data Collection

The qualitative data collection entailed the use of one-on-one in-depth interviews, while the quantitative data collection entailed the use of questionnaire interviews that were administered by the principal researcher himself.

Unit of Analysis

22 beneficiaries of RDP Houses, an RDP Administrator and a social worker were involved in in-depth interviews, the latter two, however, acting as key informants; while 50 samples were subjected to questionnaire interviews. The involvement of a social worker was considered important as social workers are generally concerned with the wellbeing of the people; while the RDP administrator was also important as he/she was the one who was concerned with the administration of the RDP houses.

Sample Selection

Both probability and non-probability sampling methodologies were employed. The probability selection entailed the use of simple random and stratified sampling techniques to select the samples for the quantitative enquiry about the quality of the RDP houses; while the non probability methodology entailed the use of purposive sampling technique to elicit opinions, thinking, and attitudes of the participants on the quality of the RDP houses. While the use of purposive sampling is very useful to investigate a few samples with the research desirable attributes to get their insights, random sampling techniques were important to afford the researcher to get a fair representation of views, thinking and attitudes of the respondents (Babbie 2007; Neuman 2006).

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher was assisted by a translator from the Social Work Department as a research assistant in data collection and jotting field notes as well to make sure all data can be interpreted. All the data that was that collected from inter-

views was audio taped and transcribed later on after data collection. This data was grouped and categorized and arranged in themes that the researcher discovered from emergent views from the participants.

Research Domain

The data were collected in November 2012 in Golf Course Estate in Alice Town in the Eastern Cape Province. Further, the beneficiaries of RDP houses were interviewed from their houses while the RDP administrator and the social worker were interviewed from their offices. The population of the area was 1233 houses.

FINDINGS

Profile of Housing Beneficiaries

The study revealed a skewed gender discrepancy in that 62 percent of the participants were females; while 38 percent were males. The study also indicated that 88 percent of the participants were black whereas 12 percent were colored. The study also revealed that 60 percent of the participants were single; while 28 percent were married and; 6 percent widowed; while those that were either, widowed, divorced or separated were 2 percent each respectively.

Socio-economic Status

The study revealed an uneasy employment situation among the beneficiaries in that 52 percent of the participants were unemployed, 32 percent were employed, 6 percent were casual laborers, 8 percent were students and 2 percent were self-employed. These findings were supported by the following qualitative sentiments:

"It is very difficult to live in these RDP houses given that there are no job opportunities. Even though we are not happy with the houses but my cry is for the government to do something about jobs for us at least."

These sentiments from the beneficiaries indicated the level of hardship they underwent in Golf Course. Their open plea for jobs demonstrated a desire to liberate themselves from the jaws of poverty. It could be very timely if the government creates an enabling environment for other stakeholders to partner with the government in asset based community development

as well as developmental projects and income generating projects to assist these beneficiaries. This is because employment opportunities can empower these people socially and economically.

Faulty Windows

The findings from this study indicated that 74 percent of the participants revealed that the windows were of poor quality whereas 10 percent indicated that the windows were fair and only 16 percent indicated that the windows were of good quality. The findings were supported by the following qualitative sentiments:

"We have to put wire and paper by the windows to keep them closed; we wonder what kind of windows they are?" "The lack of proper windows on our houses is also one of the primary causes why we are suffering from diseases and it's very dangerous for our children."

The findings above indicates the level of discomfort that the housing beneficiaries found themselves in. As windows are very important structures that enable circulation of air in the house, and also security, this posed a serious discomfort. The state of the windows could also be an avenue of diseases if they are not secure or not closing well. To this end, a score of beneficiaries worried about their state of health through cold engulfing their houses.

Weak Roofs

The findings from this study indicates that 72 percent of the participants revealed that the roofing was of poor quality; while 18 percent revealed that they were fair and only 10 percent revealed that they were good. These perceptions were corroborated with the following qualitative sentiments:

"The roofs are not strong and we have to put stones on top to stop them from falling and these stones are very dangerous for our children because if they fall, they can hurt them."

This reveals that the construction of these RDP houses was done without any careful thought for the beneficiaries who were going to use these houses. Putting stones to prevent the roof being blown away presents a high level of discomfort. It also sets the beneficiaries in a worrying state of affairs as the stones on the top of the roofs were hazardous especially during the time of strong winds. These researchers

think that the government needs to reconsider renovating these houses as they pose a security threat to the welfare of the beneficiaries.

The State of Toilets

The findings from this study indicates that 58 percent of the participants revealed that the toilets were of poor quality; while 26 percent indicated they were fair; and 16 percent indicated they were good. These perceptions were corroborated with the following qualitative sentiments from the beneficiaries:

“The material of the toilets is not strong, the handles are breaking. Again these toilets are supposed to be outside since it’s a one roomed house. The state however poses a lot of discomfort.”

“It is so difficult living with these toilets. There is no water to flush them.”

The revelation above indicates a worrying state of discomfort that the house occupants were undergoing. These researchers who bear witness of this situation consider it unhealthy to live in a situation where the toilet does not have water to flush out. It poses both a health and a psychological challenge. It is their thinking that the toilets would have been positioned outside the house separate from the house. These researchers, therefore, think that the government needs to carry out an assessment of these toilets and consider repositioning them appropriately. The issue of ensuring piped water in the estate is also critical.

Quality of the Floor

The findings from this study indicated that 72 percent of the participants revealed that the quality of the floor was poor; while 14 percent indicated that it was fair; and 14 percent also indicated that the floor was good. These perceptions were corroborated with the following qualitative sentiments,

“The floor of these houses is weak. It is cracking and can injure anyone. People need to be careful as they walk across the floor of their houses. It’s indeed awful.”

These sentiments indicate that the poor condition of the floor requires attention in order to protect the beneficiaries from any accident. These researchers also think that the house floor is an important part of housing structure that needs

serious attention. They contend that the state of discomfort that the bad floor poses to the housing beneficiaries is indeed a violation of their human rights. They are of the opinion that the government needs to monitor the quality of the houses. The housing developers should also ensure quality assurance.

The State of the Walls

The findings from this study indicates that 76 percent of the participants revealed that the walls were of poor quality; while 8 percent indicated that the walls were fair; while 16 percent revealed that the walls were good. These perceptions were corroborated with the following qualitative sentiments from the beneficiaries:

“At least the government must change the construction company because these construction companies used less cement and more sand which resulted in weak and very poor walls.”

“These houses are not adequate for habitation. The walls are cracking and crumbling.”

These perceptions blame the government for lack of quality assurance in the construction of the houses. This, some argued, was probably due to corruption resulting in unqualified construction companies being given the tender to put up the houses. This defeats the objectives of the social developmental theory and basic needs approach as well as human rights upon which this housing program is theoretically premised.

The State of the Doors

The findings from this study indicates that 82 percent of the participants revealed that the doors were of poor quality; while 10 percent indicated that the doors were fair; while 8 percent indicated that the doors were good. These perceptions were corroborated with the following qualitative sentiments from the beneficiaries:

“These companies are not right, these houses are too poor’ Look at the direction the doors are facing. These companies are very bad!!!”

These perceptions indicate the lamentations that the occupants make with regards to the state of the doors. These researchers are worried that with South Africa crime rate being high in most of the areas, the state of weaker doors could cause undue psychological loss. It therefore raises suspicion whether the government ever con-

Table 1: Perceptions on quality of RDP houses

<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Quality of windows</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Quality of roofing</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
1	Good	8	16.0	1	Good	5	10.0
2	Fair	5	10.0	2	Fair	9	18.0
3	Poor	37	74.0	3	Poor	36	72.0
4	Total	50	100.0	4	Total	50	100.0
<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Quality of toilets</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Quality of floors</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
1	Good	8	16.0	1	Good	7	14.0
2	Fair	13	26.0	2	Fair	7	14.0
3	Poor	29	58.0	3	Poor	36	72.0
4	Total	50	100.0	4	Total	50	100.0
<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Quality of walls</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Quality of doors</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
1	Good	8	16.0	1	Good	4	8.0
2	Fair	4	8.0	2	Fair	5	10.0
3	Poor	38	76.0	3	Poor	41	82.0
4	Total	50	100.0	4	Total	50	100.0

siders merit and competence while giving tenders to the construction companies.

DISCUSSION

This study revealed a gender discrepancy in that most of the participants were females compared to males. This indicates a state of gender skewedness and agrees with national statistics that there are more females in South Africa than males (Ratele 2008). Nationally statistics indicates that there are 52 percent females compared to males who constitute 48 percent (Statistics South Africa (SSA) 2010). Generally, this also leads these researchers to agree with other numerous literatures that indicate that there are more female headed households in South Africa. To say the least, the female headed households are the most vulnerable in terms of socio-economic deprivation. This state of the poverty of women or the so called feminization of poverty appears to be a common characteristic of many countries in Africa (Chant 2003; Mansea 2002 as cited by Schartz et al. 2011; Musekiwa 2013; Kang'ethe 2013).

It is also not surprising that this research study findings indicated that there were more blacks than colored people residing in these houses. This could be due to the general representation of races in South Africa where blacks are more than coloreds in the population (SSA 2010). This could also explain the proportion of the blacks with houses compared to the colored individuals. The findings also revealed that there

were more residents who are single than those that were, either married, divorced, widowed. Subjectively from observation, these single people appeared poor and in economic deprivations. While apparently the state of unemployment and underemployment could hugely explain the observation, perceptions from other research studies indicate that single people in South Africa have been acknowledged to be the ones mostly affected by poverty (Rodgers 2006 as cited by Manomano 2013). This, therefore, indicates a great need for social policies to lean towards affirmative action through helping these people kick-start small scale businesses. Funding and massive training, especially in manual oriented skills would probably change their economic situations.

The findings from the study also indicated that most of the participants were unemployed. Some of the sentiments even echoed a great desire for the government to "at least do something about employment as we are severely suffering." These findings agree with other authors who affirm that unemployment is very high in South Africa and that the government needs to acknowledge it is a big challenge (Triegaardt 2008: 485; Segal and Brawley 2009; Larson et al. 2002 as cited by Kamper and Badernhost 2010). This state of affairs may, therefore, require the collaboration between both government and non government agencies in resuscitating these housing programs by encouraging investment that will possibly create employment opportuni-

ties to these people residing in these houses. It could also be a time to take lessons from other countries such as Kenya that have invested heavily in the Jua kali sector to encourage entrepreneurship among the people. Jua Kali sector means business done in the sun outside any unsheltered roof (Daily Maverick 2013).

Findings from most of the study participants also revealed that the quality of the RDP houses was poor. The state of the roofs, walls, floors, toilets and doors was reported to be very bad and in need of immediate attention. These problems have also been blamed to be contributing to or prompting diseases among these beneficiaries. The findings agree with other researchers who have documented that the RDP houses are poorly done, as they crumble after a few years of use. It is to this end that the then Minister of housing in 2009 acknowledged that many RDP houses were unfit for occupation (Mafukidze and Hoosen 2009; Bradlow et al. 2011: 269). This also motivates these researchers to recommend the government to formulate ways of revisiting the construction of the RDP houses in order to give the residents a decent and humane living (Manomano 2013).

The issue of access to safe and qualitative toilets cannot be overemphasized as they serve to enable people to refresh and relinquish human waste in a healthy and a dignified way. Unfortunately, findings from this study indicated that the toilets are improperly positioned and make the users feel uncomfortable. To exacerbate the situation, they have no water to flush out. The situation in Golf Course, however, parallels with other RDP houses in the country. For example, in Western Cape Vrygrond RDP houses were discovered to lack normal toilets (Van Huesden and Pointer 2006). The residents of those houses were using bucket system of toilets where the sewerage is disposed in holes that are dug by these residents and then they use sand to close the holes (Van Huesden and Pointer 2006). The issue of toilets, in these researchers contention is a serious one among the RDP residents in many parts of the country. It is critical that both the government and non government agencies invest into installation of proper toilets. This will promote and ensure good health sanitation for the beneficiaries of the RDP houses. In most cases, it would be very honorable if the toilets can be installed outside the house, especially for one roomed RDP houses to reduce discomfort.

CONCLUSION

While the government of South Africa is among very few governments building houses to its needy citizens, and this it's doing following strong policy environment, these researchers contend that the same government should have space and cause to take stock of the quality of the houses. To say the least, the millions and millions invested in, putting up these houses constitute taxpayers money. Thus, the housing beneficiaries need to be accessed decent and humane houses. On another angle, the citizens and any other taxpayer need to be ensured the right value of the money spent. Issues of corruption and incompetence in contracting processes need to be annihilated completely. South Africa being one of the biggest welfare country in the world needs to have housing programs that are models for other countries in Africa to follow suit.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These researchers have, therefore, suggested the following recommendations for the improvement and augmentation of the RDP houses.

Renovation of the RDP Houses

These researchers based on the findings as well as many complaints that rose across many corners. South Africa are of the view that it is worthwhile for the RDP houses to be renovated. This is because the present quality has not been worth the dignity of the beneficiaries. The government needs to revise its contracting system, to award contracts to the contractors who have a reputation of constructing qualitative houses. This can be achieved through a quality assessment as well as inspection process of those companies by quality assessors. Ensuring the toilets are well positioned in order to guarantee human dignity is critical. The government should consider assessing the situation and calculating ways in which they can reinstall new strong toilets that will last for a long time.

Whistle Blowers and Platforms for Debate

The findings from this study also motivate the recommendation for a platform that will raise awareness to the government towards any ir-

regular and improperly constructed houses. This will ensure that housing problems in the RDP houses do not go for a long time without any attention. Since, we are living in a fast advancing age, it can be of paramount importance if the government considers establishing public debates between various levels of government and their departments with the public in various parts of the country or even on the television. This kind of debates will likely promote and instill accountability to all the stakeholders involved with the construction of those houses.

Enhance Employment Opportunities

Since it is a fact that there are more single people and females who are affected by poverty, it may also be understandable if the government can consider equipping these people with various informal oriented skills such as indigenous craftsmanship, needle work, and other business entrepreneurship skills. This can possibly mitigate the higher levels of unemployment and underemployment. The government can divert some money through its affirmative action of mobilizing and creating employment. To this end, the government could seek collaboration with the NGO sector and other public and private sector institutions to assist. On another note, the government may consider consulting the private sector and other stakeholders for partnership in investing in these locations so that they can afford employment opportunities to these people.

Embracing the Principle of Social Justice

These researchers see it timely to encourage various professions, especially those involved in bolstering the state of social well-being of the people such as social workers to put more effort in working holistically for the rights of the needy and vulnerable residing in RDP houses. They should firmly position themselves in taking space and social responsibility to ensure that the government becomes responsible to its citizens. Ensuring people are accessed decent and human houses are such critical examples.

Future Studies

These researchers informed by the problems facing the beneficiaries advocate for an empiri-

cal study that will investigate the implementation process of the RDP housing program as a channel to evaluate the success or impediments to the housing program.

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