THE IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON HOUSING IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The world has become a global village. Culture, attitude, and the entire social structure of a nation have all been influenced one way or the other by this phenomenon. These changes are manifest in many ways especially as regards what we do and how we do what we do. This paper examines and discusses the impact of globalization on housing in Nigeria by focusing on aspects of planning, design, and construction. It intends to propose how a developing country as Nigeria, in striving to be an active participant in the general global trend in the housing sector, should evolve policies that would harmonize culture/attitudes with the advantages of globalization.

Key words: Globalization, design, traditional housing, image, technological adaptability.

Introduction

Housing more than anything else touches all humanity partly because of its importance/utility and partly because it holds up a very revealing mirror to the kind of society, we live in. A house reflects how we feel about ourselves and it defines the space within which we live for shelter. It goes on to condition how we behave.
Housing as built environment, is a reflection of our culture, our taste, our preoccupations, our civic priorities, etc. Through the architecture of our houses, an environment is created in which our past, present, future aspirations are expressed. Today however, the concept of housing as a physical structure and a means of identity has been transformed or blurred by globalization from distinguishable identification to something close to uniformity.

The Nigerian landscape is dotted with products of alien architecture. There is low prevalence of indigenous architecture, which is attributable to globalization. The alien products are in themselves good but the question is whether our cultural values can be adjusted to derive the inherent benefits of such products or whether we are technologically adaptable to make them function for our needs.

Housing as a process has undergone transformation in terms of number of new concepts and complexities. This is largely due to information exchange on new and better construction techniques, new materials, etc.

This paper appraises the impact of globalization on housing. It presents the transition from traditional indigenous housing development through conventional housing to the present modern concept of enhanced housing enabled by globalization.

Globalization is an irreversible worldwide process hinged on advancement in technology and manifest in products development and information dissemination. Thus, it promotes world integration through exchange of ideas on local and global practices. However, some see this new trend as a source of opportunity to capture market especially where locally available technology cannot cope with the changes and pressure of this irreversible trend and in the end would want to use the opportunity to reduce local participation. This is particularly more pronounced in construction market. They see the rewards in this as huge and swift. Others regards this global trend as opportunity to effect improvement on their past practices and standards as may be necessary. To some others the changes brought about by globalization are seen, as threat to their security and domination and in parts of industrial and developing world, the cause of protectionism is far from defeated. These shades of opinions had restricted full and active participation in the process of global integration.

**Development and the influenced of Globalization**

**The Driving Forces of Global Integration**

The key factors in globalization and global integration are technological changes and continually failing communications, and relative transport costs. All of these have made it easier to navigate the world. It has been easier to access goods, capital, people
and ideas. People around the world are living increasingly intertwined lives. Most of the world’s population now lives in countries that are either integrated into the markets for goods and finance or rapidly becoming so. Countries are opening their borders to flows of trade and investment capital, entering the global market and establishing deep linkages.

However, care is needed because, in most cases, we are looking at relatively short-term developments in global situation timescale so new ideas for exploitations within ten years are already born. The question is which will die in infancy and which will reach maturity?. There are obvious candidates that have already mature and are themselves ready for selective breeding such are the general areas of information technology. In respect of construction, changes in process or techniques such as industrialized systems of building have lived but for a while. Whereas the prediction on how microcomputer technology will affect our lives are legion, ranging from programmed domestic hardware to the total disappearance of paper as the medium of information storage and transmission, total departure from the drawing boards and a host of other issues. In summary, the advent of computer has brought humanity into an entirely new dimension of industrial control system for a more dynamic and precise practice.

Coping with the impact of Globalization

According to Rodrik, (1997)[1] cited in Ngowi and Lema (2000)[2] economists’ standard approach to globalization is to emphasize the benefits of the free flow of goods, capital and ideas and to overlook the social tensions that may result. Ngowi and Lema (2000)[3] asserted that globalization engenders conflicts within and between nations over domestic norms and social institutions that embody them. To cope effectively with the pressure of globalization two important factors must be addressed. These are whether or not our culture can be adjusted to accommodate and react appropriately to changes and whether or not the technology can keep in step with fast changing pace of global integration and even with the nature of change.

Cultural Adjustment

The culture of a people will determine how they see, react and accept new ideas and information, and the way they interact with other nationals in an atmosphere of globalization. The construction industry has become multi-cultural in this global situation and observation has shown that there are differences in the performance of construction firms managed by different national even if they operate in similar environment and draw resources from the same source.

Understanding the culture of housing development, will help in designing appropriate housing for effective utilization and management. It will also help to utilize local resources more efficiently; therefore, it is imperative to generate information on
culture and attitude to housing to avoid the abuse of current practices and procedure, which have been proven more efficient for housing delivery in other countries. Skepticism and suspicion are the offshoots of culture, which affect the development of appropriate local technology and materials and for improvement.

Technological Adaptability

Housing development in Nigeria is experiencing an unaccustomed and accelerating rate of change and has something to do with technology. However, it is not easy to specify the nature of this change to determine whether its rate has accelerated during the last ten to twenty years and to explain the presumed uniqueness of the present situation. It is necessary to point out that all industrial societies owe their unique characteristics to the fact that, the socio-economic system, are guided by the principle of “striving” to produce as much and as efficient as possible goods and services by reviewing the instruments and organization of production in accordance with technological progress.

The Metamorphosis of Housing in Nigeria

Traditional Indigenous Housing: Pre-globalization era

Traditional housing dates as far back as when early man sought the protection of natural formations as cave dwellings. This was before he learned how to construct homes. Up to the early 1980s, in most parts of Africa, traditional housing is dominated by the use of clay and timber. However, in Nigeria construction of traditional houses vary in terms of building materials available across the geographical regions of the country. Moreover, the technique is depended on the climatic conditions.

Building with mud is an inherited craft. The older and more skilled builders do not travel far and they instruct their own children to continue with the trade. The result is that after a few generations, the methods vary slightly from city to city. The skill of a craftsman is essentially a personal characteristic.

The construction techniques applied for housing in rural parts of northern Nigeria was derived from simple technology passed on from generation to generation. Collectivism and self-help are the basis for housing construction. That is, houses were built on collective or community basis, because the required labor is beyond an individual’s ability.

In terms of materials, mud accounts for more than 95% of materials used for erecting the buildings in the rural areas of Northern Nigeria. In the South West, traditional housing has a peculiar architecture. Houses are designed to reflect the political
organizations of the society. This has evolved to meet the challenges of the environment. Nevertheless, local variations are reflected by the degree of material resources utilization employed in building the houses. It is on this premise that house types in the southwest are distinctive from those of other regions.

In the Niger Delta i.e. South-south region, the ground is water logged thus providing no solid base for mud wall construction. Hence, walls are constructed with raffia poles tucked into the ground. The stronger stakes at the corners are of thick wood.

The floors are usually above water level and are made of raffia poles plastered with thin coats of mud to block the interstices. Most of the roofing are thatched, an indication of judicious use of locally available materials. Virtually all roofing materials are obtained from *raffia viniferra* and *raffia sudarica*. Their thick mid rib is used in conjunction with wood as the beam joists plaited into an open network, which form the slanting tip to the roof (Ibiwoye, 1985)[4].

**Transition to Conventional Housing: Globalization Era**

Conventional house types are those which were constructed with improved materials available in a given locality, but which requires the skill of the local carpenter or mason to erect using the drawings prepared by the draught man.

Mud bricks, cement blocks and to a lesser degree stones, corrugated iron sheets or asbestos sheets are main characteristics of conventional houses. They are found in almost all the major cities of Nigeria. They consist of a mixture of single rooms mainly rectangular used as bedroom, living room, kitchen, store, toilets and bathrooms. The technology is a bit difficult for the unskilled local hand.

The structural walls are the main parts of the building and almost all the finishes that add to the visual beauty of the house are concentrated on it. Finishes like plaster and decorations are the main types depending on the choice of the owner. The external walls are usually 23 cm to 30 cm in thickness while the internal partition walls are 15cm to 20 cm in thickness. The materials used for the wall construction have high structural strength hence eliminating possible limitation in structural design. The floor could be of ordinary cement-sand screed, P.V.C. tiles, glass tiles and quite a number of other types of finish depending on the choice of the owner. The roof structure is another beautiful part of the building that cannot be overlooked. There are quite a number of roof coverings to protect the building and add to its visual beauty. The choice of the roof covering depends on the shape of the roof. For example, corrugated asbestos sheets are used for flat roofs while tiles and corrugated asbestos sheets are used for pitched roofs.
Conventional houses can be of more than one storey due to the high structural strength of the materials used for construction. The number of storey also adds to the beauty.

**The New Image of Housing in Nigeria**

Residential buildings in Nigeria have become more purposeful. This is a reflection of the needs required in them. Services such as air conditioning, lighting and system for fire fighting, security and communications have become common features regardless of the unreliable power supply situation in the country. The advent of Public-Private partnership for housing development in the country is entrenching the concept of convivial society where decisions are based on what is preferable rather than what is desirable.

The new image of housing in Nigeria as portrayed in figures 1 and 2, can be attributed to easy access to information. Shehu (2008) [5] established that many developers are accessing and exchanging information through intranet and internet. Hence, the design of residential buildings have become more and more comprehensive and detailed, the choice of materials for their construction and the technology of construction are such that respond to nature vagaries and human habits. However, it is worth noting that there are unique problems with the design of residential buildings in a tropical setting. The designers usually have the challenge of keeping out noise, heat and dust, and yet must provide a level of comfort within the building for the occupants and preferably without artificial aid or support. This has become an imperative because of the unreliable power supply situation mentioned earlier. Moreover, alternatives are expensive.

**Policy Thrusts for a Positive Impact of Globalization**

A developing country as Nigeria, in striving to be an active participant in the general global trend in the housing sector, should evolve policies that would harmonize culture/ attitudes with the advantages of globalization. The thrust of these policies should be in the context of the following:-

(i) **Physical Infrastructure** - The provision of physical of infrastructure for housing development has been very well recognized. Wells (1986)[6] posits that many Africa countries lack the capacity to respond appropriately to the globalization because of inadequate basic civil engineering infrastructures, among other things, being in place. However, these have been provided in some countries, reliable energy supply such as electricity, constant water supply, as well as efficient transportation and communication and building practice systems have significantly promoted housing development in areas earlier consider ineffective. In other words, infrastructural facilities are essential for satisfactory performance of residential building and
satisfactory living of the occupants of the building. This should be given utmost consideration in Nigeria.

**Figure 1** Image of Material Application for Housing Development

**Figure 2** Images of Transition in Housing Development in Nigeria
(ii) **Checking Environmental Abuse** - Mosaku (1968, 2001)[7,8] adduced that there is a correlation between social behavior and rate of deterioration of building fabrics. However, people are becoming more aware of the benefits associated with clean and well-organized housing environment. Thus, there is the need to get inputs from other disciplines as supplements to existing programs in planning, basic design theory, and construction management practice to ensure the validity of ideas and solutions for sustainable housing development in a global setting and to prevent environmental abuse and deterioration.

(iii) **Design Concepts** – According to Qurix (2007)[9], it is not easy to proffer solution for the post-modern designer because of the flexibility that exist within styles. Regardless of this submission residential building designers and developers in Nigeria should design to cope with rapidly changing environment of new functions to be fulfilled, new materials to be molded, and new production process to be exploited. Design parameters must change in the face of new evidence and innovations arising from information exchange. Design concepts should reflect the level of locally available technology with respect to construction methods. In addition, design should be more introverted to accommodate and encourage participation that is more indigenous. Most of these can be accomplished through the concepts of construction and maintainability analysis. The purposes of these concepts lie in providing feedback information to the design team as to what constitute a good design from site experience. Today’s design should strive for harmony between traditional features new styles, and personal bias.

Due to easy access to information, the design of residential buildings is now becoming more and more comprehensive and detailed. Hence, the choice of materials for their construction and the technology of construction should be towards responding to nature vagaries and human habits. However, it is worth noting that there are unique problems with the design of residential buildings in a tropical setting. The designer usually has to contend with the challenges of keeping noise, heat and dust out and at the same time providing a level of comfort within the building for the occupants and preferably without artificial aid or support that, in most cases, are unreliable.

(iv) **Construction Practice** – It is at the construction stage that design proposals and realities of construction and other issues are put to test. The construction of residential buildings has become bigger and more organized. Therefore, the right selection and management of resources and coordination of subcontractors are essential for quality works and prompt project delivery. Moreover, there are many uncertainties and conflicts, which must be resolved through appropriate planning and efficient management expertise including promotion of team spirit, coordinated supervision, efficient information recording and transmission to avoid delays and ensure prompt decision-making process.
(v) **Research and Development** - Research and development strategies are now focusing more on alternative technologies. Though one is not suggesting that the acquired scientific knowledge or imported technologies be jettisoned, but rather making use of such acquired knowledge in a more novel way. Research and development require good funding even if results are delays. There is need for corporate efforts to initiate meaningful research in materials and components development.

**Conclusion**

Housing development in Nigeria had transited from crude traditional state to a more a refined status. Residential buildings are now seen not as product to last just a couple of years but over a longer life span for many changes to occur. This requirement has brought about flexibility and adaptability for extended usefulness. This is because globalization is providing more supplements to enrich knowledge in planning, design, and construction.

The potentials for large gains in globalization in Nigeria’s housing sector are enormous. Whether they will be realized will depend on the policy choices made and the reactions of stakeholders in the country.

It should be noted however, that the harsh reality of global situation is that policy failures are punished hard. Therefore is imperative to be critical of decision-making process on issues of housing and be committed and supportive once taken.

**References**

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