Empower the Urban Poor and the Immigrants to Improve their Housing Situations

Mohammed Aliyu

Department of Architecture, Federal Polytechnic, Mubi, Nigeria

*Corresponding Author: *Mohammed Aliyu, Department of Architecture, Federal Polytechnic, Mubi, Nigeria*

Abstract: *House is an indicator of man's standard of living in a society; it is a "process" and also a "product". It is always a process because it under goes through some creativity and stages, and it is a product because it passes through some processes that resulted to indicate the status of living. The urban poor and the immigrants' places are always noticed by the shanty and squalor settlement of towns and cities. Contemporary complicated situations facing the urban poor plus immigrants and their housing situation require a deep re-examination of how to improve their wellbeing and daily in-come so as to change the condition of their built environments in general. However, the urban poor and the immigrant are the people who are currently facing problems everywhere, in most of the settlements, which often needed a more and more holistic, exceptional and comprehensive treatments. Government such as social works, or even able individual community activists (voluntary) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) can help the urban poor and the immigrants significantly to improve their living conditions and their housing situations. This study aimed at discussing how to empower the urban poor and the immigrants so as to improve their living environment (housing). The question this study tends to provide answers are; who are the urban poor or the immigrants? What are the mediums of empowerment in which government, or individual community activist (voluntary) or Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) will follow? The discussion will further explore the various way of assisting urban poor and the immigrants. Personal opinion and observation with the related literature are the method of sourcing data in how to assist the urban poor and the immigrants to increase the value and condition of their housing situations, and also their life style in general.*

Keywords: *Urban poor and the Immigrants, Housing, Government, NGOs, individuals, Empowerment.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, 'ethnic problems', 'religion crisis', and 'regional conflicts' are displacing a large number of refugees and immigrants which is always associated with poverty and also generating bad conditions of living in societies (Schmitz, et al. 2003). The urban poor and the immigrants with their children in-fact the entire families are facing difficulties due to some circumstances beyond their control. Their housing situations and well-beings are becoming worst and worst everyday due to lack of finance, high cultural influences or minimal social understanding of good housing effects. Helping to provide jobs, accommodations or educational programs and practices of survivals to the low-income households or the urban poor and immigrants is always a worldwide challenge to most national governments, especially in countries where most citizens are adequately fed (Downs, 1969). However, even in other places with comparatively large public housing programs for the financially incapacitated citizens, still it is extremely hard to gain access to some sort of formal shelter for all (Bredenoord & Lindert, 2009). Therefore, to this end, limited number of professional institutions, Non-Governmental organizations tightly embraced the concept of empowerment or personal determination as guiding principles to assist the urban poor and the immigrants.

Few among the organizations operate the 'micro-to-macro' system of supports that is tailor-made to solve the many possible needs of the urban poor plus the immigrants, and their general well-being (David & Okamura, 2007). These principles or way of assistance are the required means for supports, but usually not enough for the change of housing situations for the urban poor, the refugees as well as the immigrants. Accordingly, Jackson & Esses (2000) says these approaches "could lead to an undermining of support specifically for those types of help that would be most empowering to

immigrants". If the real sources of finance of the urban poor and the immigrants' rises up and their understandings of good built environment also changes, then housing situations too will be upgraded from all perspectives. At this point on time when positive changes happened Downs, (1969) says "social class mixture and racial mixture" with good neighborhood can be seen clearly in a socially accepted manner. For example in many developing zones such as America, North America, and the European countries, serious political contest are currently growing which deals with the reality that any person, especially immigrants and the urban poor, will be significantly engaged in a program and will be supported to improve their wellbeing so as to realize progressive social change, as well grab the opportunity in their mixed cultural setting (Musterd, & Andersson, 2005). Downs, (1969) further noted that when things changed positively the immigrants and urban poor can gradually improve and upgrade their standard of living. Thereby skimpy housing condition would come in to focus in opposite of the existing housing situations. Where opposite conditions prevail, upgrading is usually accomplished by moving to a better neighborhood, as in the case of United States and many more developed nations (Gonzalez, et al. 2012).

Ways of empowering the poor and immigrants is quite simple for the Governmental or the Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) which also increases rest of mind for the whole nations. "Empowerment by contribution of a structure (shelter) or opportunity for creating partnerships with related communities, body of a relevant programs and other social service organizations, as well as a whole to respond to many challenges faced by the poor will be of significant to existing situation (Gonzalez, et al. 2012). For example, Chang & Aoki (1997) pointed out that, the more effective the sense of the unity in undertakings, being it 'poor or not poor, immigrants or citizens' the more natural the restricted there were, and vice versa. Going by the statements of these scholars the urban poor and the immigrant too have some great impact in community development programs. The more government or any organizations empower the refugees, immigrant or the poor the more they are solidifying or helping the structure of their nation. Therefore, this paper will discuss the processes of empowering the urban poor and the immigrants so the they can change their built environment from all perspectives. The discussion in this paper focuses it scopes on how the urban poor and immigrant can be assisted so as to improve their housing situation. The study will further focus on Government agencies, Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) bodies, or even a single capable activist to see how they will render assistance to the poor and the immigrants. Finally, this paper will therefore, help to fill in gap in the literature with respect to urban poor and the immigrants.

2. URBAN POOR AND THE IMMIGRANTS

In a literature the word "immigration is derived from Latin means *migratio* and is the act of foreigners passing or coming into a country for the purpose of permanent residence, and is due to many reasons, such as economic situation, political crisis, family re-unification, natural disaster, poverty or the wish to change one's surroundings voluntarily" (Carreón et al., 2005). It is however, admitted that conditions regarding change of living place due some unfavorable conditions such as war, natural disaster or any unforeseen circumstances may lead to poverty. And, poverty is confoundedly inconvenient, it can pin someone down in all aspect of life such as living situation. It can change the status of every progressive act. Although urban poor and the immigrants are two different people; someone may be poor but not an immigrant. While immigrant is someone who under goes the above listed problems and changed place of living for better tomorrow. However, Katz (1985) expresses that "through most of the eighteenth century, 'poverty' continued primarily to connote a pitiable state, and earlier before the major changes in industrial programs, poverty was essentially (what it had) always been: a natural, unfortunate, often tragic fact of life, but not necessarily a demeaning or degrading fact".

As poverty climbed, access to normal housing and the availability of adequate certain daily material and personal support for those in need of it remain the most difficult aspect of life. The poor, immigrants and refugees usually transformed from unfavored moral adjectives of pain into something of disgrace and disgust, which flourishes from one end to another that turned life not worthy (Katz, 1985). Even access to safe good living area has become a problem; people (urban poor and the immigrants) lived in dilapidated houses or in short dwellings with enormous shortage of living spaces. Urban poor and the immigrants that changed place of living due to unfavorable conditions are the

people discriminated and always facing huge problems in most communities when it come settlements. Today in almost all the nations both Governmental and Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs), don't longer focus on these categories of people for any assistance. According to Blumenberg (2007), Bach and Carroll-Seguin in 1986 agreed that many immigrants during the movement, the first group of newcomers usually came from homes with relatively adequate socio-economic class and therefore, reached to urban cities with both standard education and good working experience. But due to lack of concern and today's systematic unfavorable treatment of a protected class those poor and the immigrants became useless with their education and the good working experience. The urban poor and the immigrant are the people currently not doing good in our urban environments they have been expecting supports and intense assistance to structure their dynamics housing situations. Government agencies, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and personal capable activist (individual) can empower the urban poor and the immigrants significantly.

3. MEDIUM OF EMPOWERMENT

In general terms, the supply of good housing for the refugees, urban poor and the immigrants in most developing and under-developing states have not in any way improved over the past years. Urban poor and the immigrants are the ones that usually rely on their own cleverness, actions, originalities, creativities and available means in order to source their demand of shelter. These alternatives always resulted to ugly, shanty and squalor settlements. Even though they are "challenged with the shortage of so-called socially accepted housing type or formal way of living. Accordingly, the urban poor and immigrants have almost no other alternative than to stay in an informal housing situation" (Downs, 1969). In-fact to always relay on government directly to provide shelter without any financial means or knowledge of improving or maintaining those houses is also another problem. For example, Shroder, (2002) says there are three principal forms of direct housing assistance, and the United State America uses all the three ways: "vouchers system, public housing, and private subsidized projects". And, he further pointed out that "vouchers subsidize the rent of privately owned units, selected by the tenants, of at least minimum quality, some public agency owns, and some public agency subsidizes, a public housing project, while private subsidized projects are under contract with the government to reserve some number of subsidized units for low-income households" (Shroder, 2002). In this situation Shroder focuses on those low-income people that are opportune to have link with the government housing programs. What of those urban poor or the immigrants that are doing worst, living in a shanty and squalor settlement as stated above. I think government or any organization should find ways of empowering them so as to significantly improve their housing situation.

Jackson & Esses, (2000) says "*Empowerment"* is derived from Brickman et al.'s description of "compensatory helping". They further noted that "empowerment holds as its goal the removal of barriers to the success of the recipient group and involves helping members of a group to help themselves". This however, led Parmar, (2003) to define empowerment as the "process of discovering one's internal strength, agency, and capacity to affect change in the institutions, behaviors, and ideologies that form the basis of one's experience of oppression and exploitation in daily life, as well as at the meta-level". For example, provision of housing development programs within the settlement area of the urban poor or immigrants, or creating job opportunities for the urban poor and the immigrants is one of medium of empowerment. And also, introduction of informal housing study program can really help, so that they will know the bad effects of informal settlement. Provision of supportive programs by the government through social welfare or supply of affordable accommodations to urban poor and the immigrants reflects direct assistance which also serves as way of empowerment (Jackson & Esses, 2000). In order to understand the proper way of empowering the urban poor and immigrants is good to further categorize it in to different groups, such as governmental, Non-Governmental and individual empowerment.

3.1. Empowerment through Government Agencies

Empowerments through government such as social work departments, housing development authority departments and so on, are the number one sources of assistances or mediums to help the urban poor and the immigrants so as to significantly improve or change their housing situation. Schmitz, et al. (2003) pointed out that "it is incumbent upon social workers, as professionals committed to social and economic justice, to comprehensively understand the range of obstacles facing the urban poor, immigrants and the refugees, and empower them in their struggle to make a healthy adjustment"

Although rendering effective education and issuing job to the less able ones is the largest means of eradicating poverty in every community. Jackson & Esses, (2000) says government direct assistance"is based on Brickman et al.'s description of "health support". They further pointed out that direct assistance "involves solving group problems directly and holds groups responsible for neither their problems nor their solutions. If government is willing to help it can eradicate poverty completely. And, once poverty is eradicated the standard of living will be upgraded and housing situation will change positively. Parmar, (2003) says it is always assumed that urban poor and the immigrants may be assisted or generally empower by the government other than personal, or any Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). For example, government provision of social welfare such as, "micro credit loans", with effective enlightenment on "social" and "economic in-come" benefits or even the provision of subsidized housing to urban poor and the immigrants reflects a kind of direct assistance.

While in an indirect assistance, job creation for urban poor and the immigrants can adequately help them to improve themselves and their housing situations. This system of indirect assistance creates an avenue for them to make decision on how to change the quality of environment, their housing situation and their life style in general. Jackson & Esses, (2000) acknowledged that "direct assistance, in contrast, may not clearly increase urban poor or the immigrants' competitiveness when it does not include steps that would foster independence". In assessing government empowerment for the urban poor and immigrants with right understanding to the micro-credit loan schemes the prevailing concept of "empowerment" highlight its potentials in solving huge amount of problems. small scale-credit schemes for incapacitated have been announce or defined everywhere around the world as a means of cure for both poverty and the inflict stress on the urban poor and immigrants" (Parmar, 2003). Through this medium the urban poor and immigrants can develop themselves financially, at the same time they can organize their living environment in a formal manner. Government empowerment for the poor and the immigrants creates certain equal opportunities for development and success, turning them more productive and highly knowledgeable in social understanding. At this point on time one can argue that, the 'higher' the government empowerment to the urban poor and the immigrants, the lower the bad housing situations, whether the empowerment is 'directly' or 'indirectly'. In summary, 'Government' can empower the urban poor and the immigrants through the following means:

- Jobs opportunities

- Micro credit programs

- General Educational training programs

- Enlightenment on social and economic/in-come benefits

- Training on Self-reliance and sustainable use of available resources

- Participation in government skills development programs

- Poverty alleviation programs

- Provision of vocational programs

3.2. Empowerment through Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs)

The discussion of empowerment or support to the urban poor and the immigrants through Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) has been given limited attention all over the world for past decades. For example, the immigrants/refugees in Maras Famagusta or Maiduguri in Nigeria that most of the dominants of that settlement are the natives of the city. NGOs such as Banking sectors, Voluntary Aids groups, Telecommunication Companies and so on, can significantly assist those citizens voluntarily to improve their well-being and housing situation either 'directly' or 'indirectly'. These assistances most not necessarily directly as stated in the discussion above, it can be empowerment through social movements, such as taking part in any of the organization's development programs that involved payment after the activities. Although the ways of assisting still remain competitive in international discussions, a partial agreement has been reached that empowerment is in flexible ways and can turn to good results, usually impressive welfare as known by all (Parmar, 2003).

Empowerment through Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) sometimes involves enlightenment, demonstrations and also admonishment on what income will be used for, such that the urban poor and the immigrants or in general members of the forum can change themselves in order to improve their condition of living. These actions are commonly through voluntary community development activities organize by NGOs. This also involved discussion on negative effects of informal settlement and its consequences. Even though, it is initially in the perception that groups such as urban poor and the immigrants, are always responsible for creating their own problems (Jackson & Esses, 2000). Invariably, empowerment through any means "is thought to be something that can be externally induced by creating an institutional environment that enables urban poor and immigrants to take control over material assets, intellectual resources, and ideology" (Parmar, 2003). Accordingly, the phenomenon of poverty in every community can be better understood by NGOs, since most of their activities, sources of finance and daily incomes are mainly dealing with people within and outside the communities.

Much welfare such as employments, educational scholarships, free donations, and vocational skill training can be offered to urban poor and the immigrants by the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), which also acted as indirect way of improving the housing situations. Consequently, the role of NGO's community development practitioners in less able liberation must in all means be assisted via every actions rather than kept to the usually process of 'social welfare, it must be to lift the urban poor and the immigrant's capacity to tackle existing poor housing situation and to act as partners in their everyday activities (Parmar, 2003). Accordingly, means of empowerment such as the "micro-credit loan programs" as stated above can also be used by the NGOs to assist the urban poor and the immigrant. However, poverty alleviation is not an easy task in most nations, but helping someone to improve himself is easier and more adequate. Ha, (2002) says poor housing situation in most notions cannot be change easily as people think, but can only be improve by helping the poor residents.

In summary, Non-Governmental organization (NGOs) can significantly empower the urban poor and the immigrants through the following means:

- Employment
- Micro credits loans
- Teaching thorough market strategies after given the loans
- Enlightenment and demonstrations on what income will be used for.
- Enhancing a particular service such as sanitation programs
- Providing educational scholarships
- Effective engagement in their company activities and programs
- Organizing the Formal housing training and development programs

3.3. Empowerment through Individuals

Jackson & Esses, (2000) expresses that people tend to differentiate around three approaches in assisting the urban poor and immigrants: "*indirect assistance* (the removal of barriers that the urban poor and immigrants faced when trying to fixed their problems), *direct assistance* (the straightforward supply of needed materials by the urban poor and immigrants), and *group change* which is a refusal to accept the traditional means of support and admonishment of the urban poor and the immigrants to help themselves". Going by the statement above one can clearly understand that people in a society individually can empower the urban poor and the immigrants either 'directly', 'indirectly' or a call to the 'whole group'. Empowerment occurs in a context where the urban poor and the immigrants can exercise their means through opportunities to take advantages: as urban poor and the immigrants understand their strength to make huge decision and attract something positively in a right ways, their feelings of stability in capacities is improved and they can turned so empowered in all undertakings.

It is quite difficult for someone personally to render any positive change to the entire urban poor and the immigrants, but by introducing social welfare programs like general urban sanitation can contribute immensely to the relief of bad environment and even housing situation as well. Personally, the financially capacitated people can organize anti-poverty programs, or poverty alleviation programs

to steadily increase the standard of living. As individual standard of living increases then housing situation too will shifted-up positively. For example, Zhao (2011) cited Young and said there is what is being called collective empowerment, that this collective empowerment- is referred to "as a process in which individual, relatively powerless persons engage in dialogue with each other and thereby come to understand the social sources of their powerlessness and see the possibility of acting collectively to change their housing situations" (Zhao, 2011). In this case if the financially incapacitated people can work collectively with a unity of purpose that aim to change the situation of their living environments, they will for sure be assisted by the financially capacitated people, then there will be an impressive change in their environment, housing situation, and their life style in general.

Accordingly, in the process urban poor, immigrants, and refugees are seriously empowered, and experienced reasonable impressive change, in the act of a reciprocal supporting of people in doing that, with aim that collectively they will be empowered to hired in effective sharedmanner, then wellbeing of individuals is the massive results of the actions. We individually knew the problems of urban poor and the immigrants because we are closed to them, and we personally can render a huge amount of assistance if we are willing to. Therefore, we can assist, advise, facilitate, sponsor, encourage, plan, and analyze opportunities for the slum dwellers.

In summary, we individually can significantly empower the urban poor and the immigrants through the following means:

- We individually, can assist the urban poor and immigrant to make decisions in their development and plans, and also seek for proper solutions or even design program that will help them overcome their problems.

- We individually, can consolidate the analysis of the urban poor and immigrant environment situations and what the society plan to do to and then address the situations.

- We individually, can also assist the urban poor and the immigrant to analyze the opportunities in their slum environment and making use of existing available potentials to realize and also develop their vision.

- We individually, can encourage urban poor and the immigrant to undertake development program which can be done with local available resources and to take full responsibility for local development activities.

- We individually, can facilitate good and effective dialogue between the urban poor/immigrants and any external development agencies for "mobilization" of "information" and resources.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that the urban poor and the immigrant can positively change their housing situations if they were given opportunities, such as jobs, formal educational programs on housing situations, practice or any king of assistances that can creates good social understanding and opportunities for individuals. Empowering people can, in fact, only be "affected positively" either by the Government, Non-Governmental organizations or individually, however it is always like that, only people can help people to improve their life. More importantly, as empowerment connotes its name which is understanding one's capacity to create changes and serious action on one's bad situations- it is of deem importance that urban poor and the immigrants are understood as developers rather than people influenced by external forces or receivers of assistances. Empowerment such as "Micro-credit programs" for the urban poor and the immigrants is highly an indirect means of resuscitating the declining bad housing situation. I strongly recommend Government should create jobs and also educate the urban poor and the illiterate immigrants about how to improve their difficult situations. Government, Non-Governmental organizations, and individuals should try as much as possible to give helping hands to those less able ones, so that we generally can enjoy our built environments. The urban poor and the immigrants should not always depend or rely on people or government to help them to improve their housing situations- they should try collectively as stated above to do their best to help themselves.

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AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Mohammed Aliyu, a staff of Federal Polytechnic Mubi in the department of architecture. A graduate of Architecture from Eastern Mediterranean University, Cyprus, and currently a PhD Candidate in Atlantic International University, Honolulu USA.