

ORGANISATIONAL CHALLENGES OF LOCAL AUTHORITY MANAGED PUBLIC HOUSING. A GHANAIAN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

Public housing has been widely acknowledged for its tremendous contribution to addressing housing deficit in many countries. Notwithstanding the shift towards neo-liberalism and the emphasis on private sector led housing production, public housing still remains relevant. In Ghana, the Government undertook a large scale sale of government built public housing in the 1980s in direct response to the neo-liberal call. The remaining stock which were transferred to local authorities (LAs) to own and manage continue to contribute to labour mobility and productivity by offering secure housing for some civil servants. Unfortunately, the conditions of the houses have largely been described as poor due to ineffective management and maintenance; more technically described as organisational challenges. The purpose of this study was to identify the challenges LAs face in the management of public housing. The study interviewed policy makers at the national level, local authority officers and tenants. It found that, there is inadequate policy and regulatory framework for housing management. Furthermore, poor organisational structure and coordination, inadequate skilled personnel, and inadequate finance are among key challenges of public housing management. The paper suggests a concentration of housing management activities at the local level, developing a clear structure and defined roles for actors, and tenant participation as potential directions for solutions to these challenges.

Key words: *public housing, housing management, local authorities, organisational challenges, Ghana*

1. Introduction

Housing is undoubtedly one of the most important necessities of life; and according to the United Nations everyone is entitled to, as of right in a decent form. Unfortunately, the world continues to grapple with issues of quality and quantity requirements of housing for an increasing global population. While much effort is directed at increasing the housing stock, it is arguably more imperative to keep the existing housing in habitable conditions. In that regard, maintenance becomes an important component

in the discourse about global housing need. Indeed maintenance is so important that the United Nations has stated that building houses alone does not bring about the desired change, unless good housing management concepts and effective practices are established to promote community development, social improvement, proper maintenance and upkeep of estates and financial arrangements for repaying loans and collecting and carrying charges (UN, 1969; In van Wyk, 2006). Unfortunately, the housing discourse especially in many developing countries has largely focused on provision (e.g. Ademiluyi, 2010; Dube, 2013; Ngomba, 2014); and quality, or satisfaction with existing quality (Ibem & Amole, 2013; Ukoha & Beamish, 1997; Yakubu et al, 2014); not much attention has been paid to maintenance. Sadly, where maintenance has been discussed (e.g. Cobbinah, 2010; Oladapo, 2006), the focus has largely been to echo visible evidences of poor maintenance, with little attention to the underlying courses. Concerns about poor maintenance are particularly rife in both private and public rental housing in developing countries (See Asabere, 2007; Cadstedt, 2010; Komu, 2010; Obeng-Odoom, 2011a). Poor maintenance, or the lack of it accounted largely for the decision of most governments to sell-off public housing units at subsidised prices to largely sitting occupants in the hope that they will maintain them (UN-HABITAT, 2003).

In Ghana, most public housing was sold out to sitting tenants for similar reasons like poor maintenance and refusal of occupants to pay rents (Asabere, 2007). The remaining stock were transferred to local authorities to manage and maintain. However, it would seem that even though the government recognised its failure to maintain, significant steps have not been taken to avert the same fate befalling the new managers, local authorities.

1.1 The state of local authority managed public housing

The expectation has been that the new managers will do better to maintain and improve the conditions in public housing. However, the accounts of occupants and reports of authors show that conditions continue to deteriorate due to poor or lack of maintenance. Obeng-Odoom and Amedzro (2011) report of poor maintenance in public housing and attribute the situation to poor maintenance attitude, lack of estate management expertise, low rents and unwillingness to pay rents. Other authors (e.g. Arku, 2006; Asabere, 2007; Asiedu and Arku, 2009; Obeng-Odoom, 2011b;

Tipple, 1999; Tufuor, 2004; UN-HABITAT, 2011) have highlighted poor management. Beneficiaries have also decried the deplorable conditions in public housing (eg. Benson, 2014). The easy way out, sell-off the houses, has proven unsuccessful in solving the problem of poor conditions. For instance, Konadu-Agyemang (2001) reports that a survey of housing conditions by the Town Planning Department in 1989 concluded that 82% of houses (rental and owner occupied) needed to be demolished because they were not fit for human habitation. More recently, Obeng-Odoom (2011a) and Osumanu, et al (2016) have reported of poor conditions in private rental housing. Unfortunately, much of the research simply highlight poor maintenance and do not delve into the underlying causes of non-maintenance. This paper contributes to fill this gap by examining the organisation for managing public housing by local authorities.

This paper examines the challenges to the organisation for management by local authorities that have contributed to poor maintenance in public housing. It posits that well organised management may lead to improved maintenance and better conditions in public housing. A deeper understanding of the organisation for housing management by local authorities is imperative for good reason. First, nearly all local authorities manage public housing, therefore, there is a potential for solutions to have greater impact on the larger housing sector. Second, public housing conditions have not really improved following the sale and transfer. Third, since the 1980s, government has not embarked on large scale construction of public rental housing⁶ (Kwofie et al, 2011). It is noted that central government or local authorities continue to construct houses albeit on a small scale as duty posts for civil and public servants. By identifying the organisational challenges, local authorities/municipalities can better organise to manage public houses. Fourth, public housing presents a convenient starting point for discourse and practical efforts to maintain and improve housing conditions in the country and real estate in general. The paper answers the questions, how is public housing by local authorities currently organised? How can the organisation of public housing be analysed? And, what challenges confront the organisation and practice of housing management by local authorities in Ghana? The next section, discusses the development of public rental housing in Ghana. Section 3

⁶ The John Kufuor government (2000-2008) started some affordable housing projects which have not been completed. The John Mills (2008-2012) and John Mahama (2012-2016) governments have completed some housing projects for sale not rental.

presents the framework used to analyse public housing management, while the methods is presented in section 4. The findings and discussions are presented in section 5. Section 6 presents a summary of the key organisational challenges and directions for solution. The conclusion to the paper is presented in section 7.

2. Public rental housing development in Ghana

Rental housing in Ghana became popular after independence in 1957, and has become important in meeting especially urban housing needs. It accounts for over 51% of housing need in Ghana. According to the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS, 2013), the rental housing tenure increased to 31% in the 2010 population census over the 2000 figure of 22.1%; the most increases occurring in urban centres. Rental housing is significant because renters do not need to own the house (Obeng-Odoom, 2011a). It allows for smaller units to be rented which is cheaper than purchasing a house. In Ghana it is typical to rent rooms in multifamily-occupied compound houses (GSS, 2014; Luginaah et al, 2010; Tipple, 1988; UN-HABITAT, 2011) which is convenient and suitable for poor and low-income households. Also, renting tends to bridge the gap between homelessness and home ownership. The rental sector may be categorised into public and private, and formal and informal (Arku, 2009).

Public rental housing is provided by the state or state agencies for largely civil servants. These houses are found across the country in relatively smaller quantities. Large quantities are found in the main cities of Accra, Kumasi, Takoradi and Tamale. The house types vary from medium-rise walk-up apartments, detached or semi-detached single or two bedroom units, to row-houses and 3 or more bedroom bungalows. Most public houses tend to be located in prime areas and relatively better serviced with roads, piped water, and sanitation and sewerage systems among others. Because of the limited quantity, public houses are mostly occupied by senior civil servants and a few junior officers.

According to Arku (2006), public housing provision began under the British colonial government following interventions to resettle victims of the bubonic plague in 1924, and the earthquake that affected parts of Accra in 1939 (see also Tipple & Korboe, 1998). It was also in response to agitations of lack of decent housing by returnee veterans of World War II. The Department of Social Welfare and Housing (DSWH), established in 1946

constructed public housing in the major towns of Accra, Kumasi and Takoradi for veterans, civil and public servants and colonial administrators (Arku, 2009). Whereas these interventions were reactive in nature, there was a more structured approach to public housing provision for the population after Ghana became a republic in 1951. The first government led by Kwame Nkrumah made provision for housing development in its 1959-1964 and 1964-1970 plans. The Tema Development Corporation (TDC) (1952) and State Housing Corporation (SHC) (1955) were the main agencies that provided housing respectively for the industrial town of Tema and the rest of the country. Other programmes such as the Low-Cost Housing Programme, and the affordable housing scheme by the Social Security and National Insurance Trust (SSNIT) were introduced to provide housing.

It is important to note that even though public housing programmes were normally conceived for low-income households, they actually served mainly government employees or employees of state agencies (Arku, 2009; Asabere, 2007). Perhaps, the government saw public housing as an incentive to mitigate the conditions of workers whose incomes were said to be low. The government also tended to use public housing to intervene in population distribution and to promote labour mobility, by planning housing in towns where employment opportunities were planned (Tipple & Korboe, 1998). Thus, public rental housing became a vehicle for facilitating the transfer of public or civil servants such as nurses, teachers and security personnel across the country. Furthermore, by targeting government employees, it also seeks to promote productivity in the public sector (Gilmour, 2009; Ibem et al, 2011; Olayiwola et al, 2005; Tipple & Korboe, 1998). However, in the 1980s there was a change in government's perception of how to address the increasing housing need of the population, this affected public housing.

2.1 Change in perception of housing development and impact on public housing

In the 1980s, amid growing financial difficulties and the need to be financially responsible (UN-HABITAT, 2003), government decided to withdraw from public housing provision as it was imprudent. This decision was spurred by failure of housing programmes occasioned by conditions such as low rent levels of public rental housing and refusal of some tenants to pay rents; these made it nearly impossible to expand the schemes or even maintain the existing stock (Arku, 2006, 2009; Asabere, 2007; UN-

HABITAT, 2003). In addition, the World Bank, IMF and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) heavily discredited public housing and propagated the notion that the public sector by nature was incapable of being an efficient landlord (Harris & Arku, 2006; UN-HABITAT, 2003). Instead, they argued, the state should play the role of an enabler for the private sector to lead housing development.

In lieu of its new role as enabler, the challenges with management, and the deteriorated conditions, government decided to sell off its public rental housing stock. However, due to public resistance, it could not sell off all of the stock. Thus, public housing declined from about 10% of total housing in 1982 (Kwofie et al., 2011) to about 3% of the total rental housing stock. A large part of the remaining stock was transferred to local authorities to manage. However, that part of the stock provided by quasi-public institutions such as the Volta River Authority (VRA), Ghana Railway Authority, Takoradi Harbour Project and Social Security and National Insurance Trust (SSNIT) for employees were not affected. Given that the motivation for the sale was partly due to poor conditions, this paper focuses on that part of public housing managed by local authorities.

3. Conceptual framework for housing management

In general, housing management refers to the process of organising, planning, directing and controlling, and executing activities to achieve desired results of good housing conditions. It involves value creation, making choices and design of organizations and management style to reflect the task within the housing sector (Magretta 2002, in Anheier, 2005). The UN has made an emphatic statement about the importance of housing management and maintenance (*supra*). This statement also gives indication of what should constitute housing management. According to Murie and Rowlands (2006) housing management should include allocation procedures, management of void properties, repairs and maintenance, support for tenants, dealing with unacceptable behaviour, and rent collection and arrears recovery. Priemus, et al (1999) categorise these activities into three: technical, social and financial. (see also Boelhouwer, 1999; Tsenkova, 2009). These housing management activities must be performed within an organisational framework that ensures effectiveness and efficiency. The question then is, how do we know the right organisational framework to achieve effectiveness and efficiency. Fortunately, we can find an answer in the 7S framework developed by

Waterman Jr. et al (1980). This 7S framework has been acclaimed as a good tool for combining the necessary elements to build a strong organisation. Indeed, Peters (2011) quotes a former McKinsey and Co. managing director, Rajat Gupta at saying the following about the 7S framework:

“The science of management continues to develop...I have always found that the 7S framework offers a sound approach to combining all of the essential factors that sustain strong organisations...the 7S framework remains one of the enduring elements of diligent, focused business management”.

The 7S framework has been adapted (figure 1) by Gruis, et al (2009) and used to analyse management of privatised housing in Europe, Australia and China. The framework is premised on the fact that effectiveness results from the interaction of several multiple and interconnected elements, including: *policy, legislation, organisational structure, human resources, finance, culture and housing quality* (the latter being an element and also the product of the rest). All the elements must be considered in equal measure to achieve holistic change. The lines connect each element to the rest to emphasize this interconnectedness. This adapted framework of Gruis et al (2009) was used to investigate the organisation for management in the case study local authorities.

3.1 The elements

Policy/strategy

Policy also referred to as strategy describes the way of carrying out housing management. It refers to the plans formulated in response to or in anticipation of changes in the external environment –customers or competitors (Waterman Jr. et al., 1980). It sets the direction and objectives for housing management. For instance, direction on how local authorities position themselves to respond to the demands of housing management.

Legal framework

The legal framework refers to legislation and procedures that regulate housing management practice and landlord-tenant relations. They define what tenants and managers can and cannot do. For example, who is eligible for public housing, what are the rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords, how to finance management and maintenance.

Organisational structure

Organisational structure describes the institutional setup, formal and/or informal division of tasks, responsibilities, and the coordination of these tasks in housing management. This structure must detail both vertical and horizontal relationships and decision-making in the organisation. In housing management, structure should provide clarity to ask questions such as: Who decides on management policy? Who carries out day-to-day management?

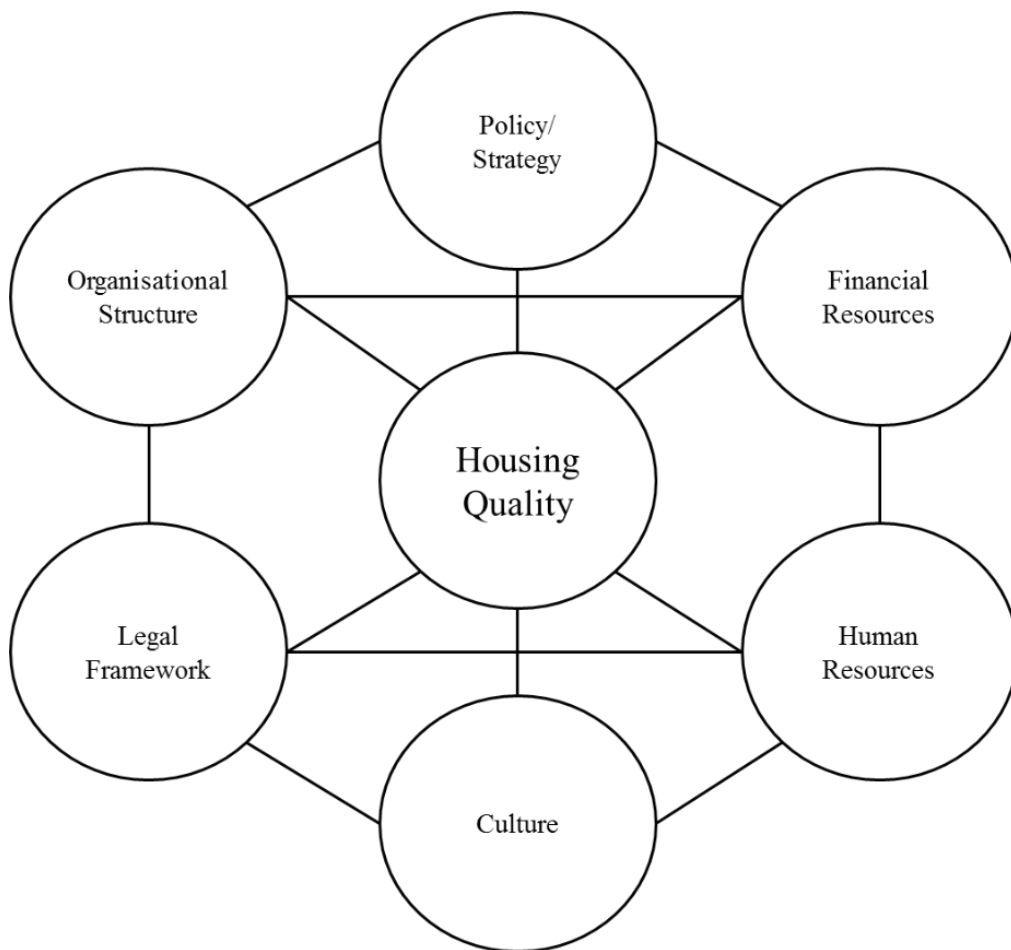


Figure 1: Organisational framework for housing management

Source: Gruis et al. (2009)

Finance structure

This element describes the financial resources available, strategies and measures in place to raise funds to finance housing management and maintenance. It underscores the importance of regular reliable and

adequate funds to manage, maintain and possibly expand the housing stock. The main sources of funds include fees and charges, rents, and borrowing. This element therefore relates to the mechanisms such as rent policy (determination, collection and dealing with arrears), procedures for raising funds externally (borrowing) and spending financial resources.

Human resource

The element of human resources describes the required and available manpower, knowledge, and skills to perform the tasks and activities of management. Technical expertise, that is, formal training is required for repairs and maintenance, financing, and coordinating management activities (Waterman Jr. et al., 1980). It examines the availability of qualified estate officers, artisans such as plumbers, electricians, and carpenters, including morale and motivation for human resource.

Organisational culture

Culture describes the values, standards, attitudes, and aspirations, which are often unwritten, that guide behaviours of people and organisations involved in housing management. For example, are households aware of their management responsibilities? How do they respond to these responsibilities? How is the relationship and responsiveness of staff to tenants and housing issues? It includes broad notions of future direction that must be infused in the behaviour of staff and the organisation (Waterman Jr. et al., 1980). Clapham et al. (2000) have stated that “organisations may listen to what managers say, but they believe what managers do” (p. 22). Therefore organisational culture can greatly impede strategic possibilities and affect performance outcomes.

Housing quality/form

This element describes the current form and quality of existing housing and the need or possibilities for improvement. The physical quality in terms of materials of construction, and repair and maintenance, as well as functional quality are important to maintain the value of the house. Do the houses need major repairs and renovations? Whereas housing quality describes the existing form of housing, it is also the product of the combination of all the other elements in the framework. For instance, the enforcement of building regulations and maintenance standards impact directly on housing quality or form.

The 7S based framework allows for a comprehensive examination of the organisation of housing management. Therefore, it is useful in identifying organisational challenges. This framework is used to describe and analyse the organisation for housing management by local authorities in Ghana.

4. Methods

The study was conducted in four local authorities in three regions namely Upper East – Kassena-Nankana municipal, Bolgatanga municipal; Upper West – Wa municipal; and Northern region – Tamale metropolis (See figure 2). These local authorities were conveniently selected based on time, proximity and access to information. The study was exploratory in nature, therefore, it adopted qualitative methods. Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey (2011) have said that qualitative research involves the use of methods such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observation, content analysis, visual methods and life histories or biographies. Semi-structured interviews and observation (notes taking and pictures), and purposive and convenient sampling techniques were used in this study.

Three groups of respondents were interviewed; at the national level officers in the ministry of Water Resources, Works and Housing (MWRWH); regional level – officers responsible for housing; at the LA level – officers responsible for housing, and tenants. The officers interviewed at the Housing ministry were a deputy director responsible for housing, and an estate officer responsible for managing the houses under the ministry. At the regional level, a deputy director at the Regional coordinating Council (RCC) responsible for housing was interviewed in both Upper East and Upper West regions, while the regional estate officer was interviewed in the Northern region. For municipalities or metropolis that double as regional capital, the regional officers exercised responsibility for the housing at the municipality. Therefore, municipal officers were not interviewed. At the district level, the officers interviewed were the co-ordinating director and an administrative assistant responsible for housing in the Kassena-Nankana municipality. All these officers were purposively selected and interview guides were used for the interviews.

Still at the local level, a total of 40 tenants (10 from each LA) were interviewed. In each of the local authorities, there are at least three housing estates. The study conveniently selected and interviewed at least five tenants in two conveniently selected housing estates. In Wa municipal, the

estates were Dobebe and Degu; in Kassena-Nankana municipal, the estates are located in Nogsenia and Sabora. In Bolgatanga, the estates are located in Tanzui and Bukere, while in Tamale Metropolis the estates are located in Sakasaka and Kukuo. The study relied on a small sample of tenants because the responses were adequate and exhaustive to present a general overview of tenants' perception. Furthermore, the study deemed the sample of tenants adequate to gain in-depth knowledge of housing challenges through detailed interviews, (Miles et al, 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Tenants were conveniently selected and interviewed using a questionnaire consisting of both closed and open-ended questions.

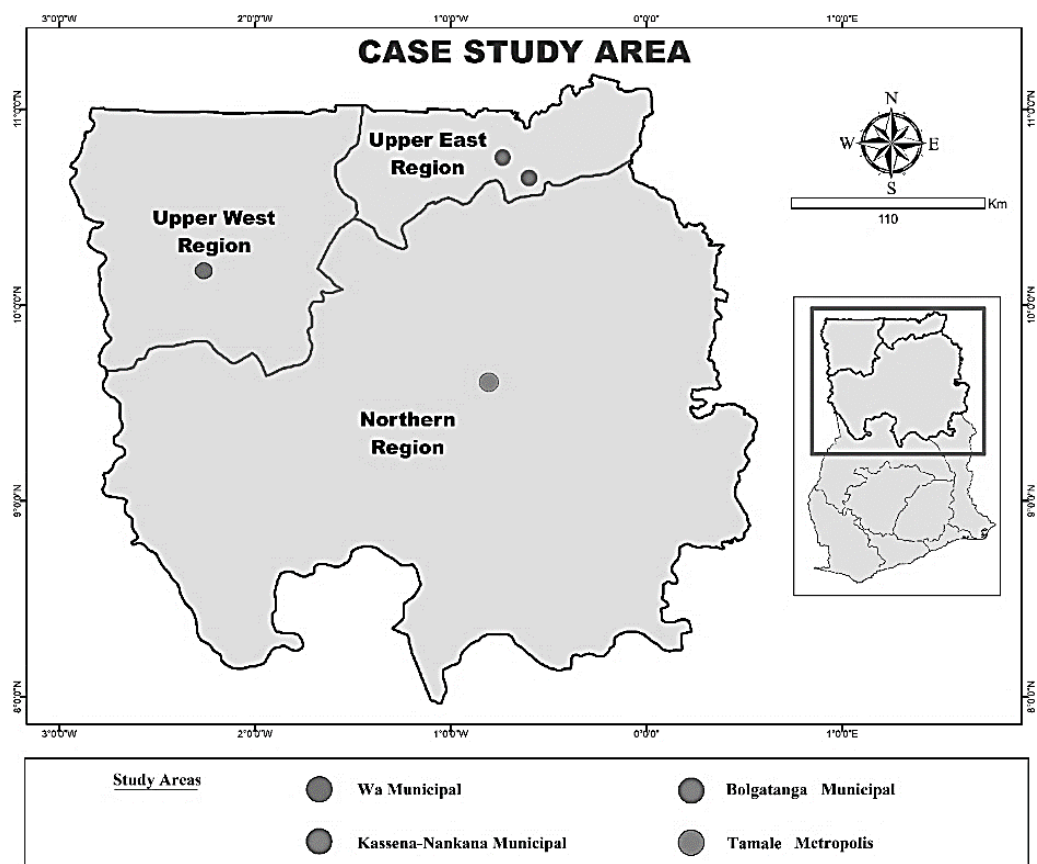


Figure 2: Map showing regions and municipalities studied

5. Findings and discussion

For the purposes of analysis, the elements of the 7S based framework can be categorised into governance related elements and operational management related elements for housing. The governance elements include: *Policy/strategy, legal framework, and finance*; whereas

organisational structure, human resource, finance, culture and housing quality are management related. This distinction is purely for the purposes of discussion as the issues cut across both categories in practice.

5.1 Governance of public housing

Policy/strategy for housing management

A housing policy gives overall direction and focus for effective housing management. The study found that there is no specific government policy for public housing. However, it found that one of the objectives of the national housing policy launched in 2015 – *“to encourage housing improvement of the existing stock, through promoting neighbourhood level maintenance and establishing incentives for effective maintenance”*, may be extended to include public housing. On the subject of specific programmes to promote public housing management and maintenance, the study found the Civil Service Administrative Instructions 1999, to be the closest to a policy for public housing. Chapter 8 of the instructions, under Staff Welfare Parts I–III, deals with accommodation of civil servants. It provides general guidance on allocation, tenant responsibility, rent payment among others for government housing.

Unfortunately, these guidelines, have either not been adequately communicated to local authorities, and so they are unaware of them, or they are aware of them but are simply not applying them to manage public housing. For instance, responding to whether there is a policy on housing management, a LA officer said, “We don't have a well-documented policy. But we have what I will describe as guidelines that help us to manage these units. These guidelines involve; applying to a bungalow allocation committee, and anytime there is a vacancy they meet to look at the applications...” (Housing officer, Navrongo, 2015). Another officer said, “Yes, we have policy guidelines...” (Deputy director, RCC, Wa, 2015). Further probing revealed that he was referring to the Civil Service Administrative Instructions, albeit unknowingly. An officer at the ministry said “there is no separate policy for public housing. All past governments have been working on the housing policy started since 2005. Fortunately. cabinet has approved it and it will be launched later this year [2015], That can take care of public housing” (Deputy Director –policy, housing ministry, 2015). Some officers may not be aware because the Administrative Instructions appear to be dated already, and may not have been widely circulated.

An examination of the Administrative Instructions show that it is fairly adequate in addressing management and maintenance. What has not been satisfactorily addressed is how to finance the maintenance by local authorities (this point is further discussed later). In the current situation, it is difficult to say that the absence of policy has negatively affected housing management. What seem obvious is that LAs are not applying these guidelines to manage the housing stock. It is also important review these guidelines to make housing management and maintenance more sustainable.

Legal framework for housing management

Like policy, there is no legislation in the strict sense for housing management. Here again, LA officers said there are guidelines. The officer in Kassena-Nankana said: "...the guidelines include a committee to make allocations based on seniority of applicants and their circumstances at the time of applying" (Housing officer, Navrongo, 2015). Interestingly, the guidelines in reference can be found in the Administrative Instructions of the Civil Service, 1999. Still on the question of regulations, and about finance in particular, an officer said: the problem is that when you are allocated a bungalow it is expected that a percentage of your salary is deducted into a special account but these deductions are done at the headquarters in Accra, the money does not come to the RCC so that we could use the money to maintain the facility, the money goes to the central government." (deputy director, RCC, Wa, 2015). The estate officer at the ministry also stated "We have regulations that we follow to allocate and manage these houses. But the problems is applying them. I think we only try to go by the allocation part" (Housing officer, MWRWH, 2015). Conceivably, the Rent Act 1963, Act 220 addresses landlord-tenant relations, and therefore may be applied in housing management and maintenance.

Even though there is no specific regulation with respect to public housing management, it appears the guidelines and laws are able to serve the purpose, albeit unsatisfactorily. The deficit, however is that they barely address issues of financing which is important to be regulated for sustainability. Again, there is the challenge of applying existing regulations.

Organisational structure for housing management

The organisational structure for housing management by LAs consist of a vertical relationship involving a central government agency (the Controller and Accountant General's Department (CAGD)), LAs (districts/municipalities) and tenants; and a horizontal relationship at the district level involving the District Administration (through allocation committee) and Works department (figure 3). Asked if LAs have any relationship with central government in regards to the houses, an officer said:

“yes, we have few cases of people who pay rent to central government. Because the rents are deducted at source, we don't get it...such arrangement existed before the public housing units were transferred to the assembly [municipality]” (Housing officer, Navrongo, 2015).

An officer explains that the allocation committee is responsible for managing the houses. However, an administrative assistant who is a member of the committee handles day-to-day operations. “... the policy guideline is that you apply to the RCC... So when you apply like that, a committee is set to review the applications and then make recommendations for management decisions. I handle the day-to-day issues.” (Deputy director, RCC, Wa, 2015). There are no specific requirements for the constitution of the allocation committee. The evidence show that it would normally include a representative from the human resource department of the municipality, municipal engineer, Works officer, and an assistant director. The Works department is responsible for carrying out repair and maintenance, and offering technical advice to the allocation committee.

The current organisational structure has implications for effective housing management and maintenance. This may not be a problem for effective housing management if the activities are coordinated. Unfortunately, this is not the case. For example, after collecting rents through direct debits of tenants' salaries, the CAGD fails to transfer same to local authorities. Instead, it is paid into the consolidated fund. Consequently, local authorities lack funds for management and maintenance of the housing stock.

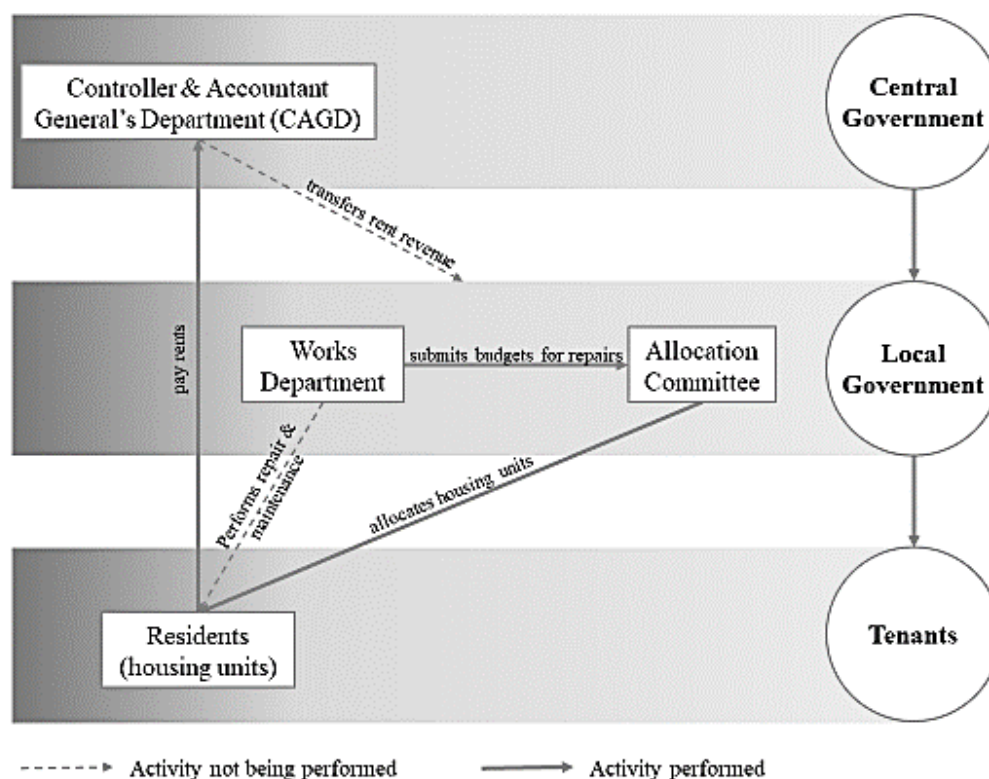


Figure 3: Current structure and relationships among actors in public housing management in Ghana

Finance structure for housing management

The study found that rent is the main source of finance available to local authorities for managing public housing. For a long time, rent have been set by central government at a flat rate of 10% of a tenant's gross salary. This means that the amount of rent is automatically reviewed anytime salaries are increased. An officer at the ministry said, "Yes, central government sets the rent. It is a flat percentage, 10% of the person's gross salary per month...It is deducted at source and controller and Accountant General's Department [CAGD] sends the money into the consolidated fund" (Estate officer, Housing ministry, 2015). "[T]he rent is 10% of basic salary which is deducted by the CAGD" (Assistant director, RCC, Bolgatanga, 2015). Unfortunately, the rent deducted by central government is not in turn transferred to local authorities for management and maintenance. See comment of LA officer supra. Other officers said:

“No, we do not receive funds for maintenance. It used to be the public works department (PWD) that would receive the money and who were in charge of maintaining the units but that has ceased.” (Assistant director, RCC, Bolgatanga, 2015). “...it is expected that a percentage of your salary is deducted into a special account but these deductions are done at the headquarters in Accra [the capital], the money does not come to the RCC so that we could use it to maintain the facilities, the money goes to the central government.” (Deputy director, RCC, Wa, 2015).

There are concerns with the current finance structure (rent determination and mode of collection) and its ability to promote effective management and maintenance. First, the rents are not economic and they are said to be unfair. An estate officer explained:

“We are not paying economic rent ... but “If we have to pay economic rent, it will be difficult for staff because of the low level of incomes. I will suggest the rent is reviewed periodically...If both a senior staff and junior staff occupy similar dwellings with similar services, the senior officer will be paying more than the junior officer because his salary is higher, and this is unfair.” (Estate officer, Housing Ministry, 2015).

The rents are not economic because, as explained by Tiple (1999) public housing aims to support civil servants whose salaries are considered to be low. In this spirit, it may be argued that the current arrangement where high earning tenants pay more for similar housing is “socialist” and therefore fair. After all, because of the inadequacy of public housing, there are many more civil servants who are paying economic rents in private housing. Comparing private and public housing, an officer said:

“Well, this is cheaper, one you have privacy, and second, where you are, there is everything. For instance, in the private houses, people rent single rooms for 50 cedis, so two rooms is 100 cedis. In the public house, you may have two rooms, hall kitchen and bath and toilet to yourself. But in a private rented house you have to share some of the facilities such as toilet and bath and kitchen.” (Estate officer, RCC, Tamale, 2015).

The suggestion by some of the officers that rents should take account of the quality of the houses may be considered. Some local authorities are able to determine their own rents through the fee-fixing resolution of the assembly for houses whose occupants do not pay rent to central government (for example, Kassena-Nankana and Wa municipalities). An officer explained that this approach to determining rents takes account of the quality of the houses. The second concern, rents not being transferred to local authorities has already been adequately explained.

The consequence of this finance structure is that no adequate finance is available to maintain the houses, as explained by an estate officer when asked about the lack of maintenance: “Funds are not released. It is a problem of lack of funds...the money does not come to PWD or Works and Housing...” (Estate officer, Housing ministry, 2015).

5.2 Management of public housing

Human resource for management and maintenance

The human resource structure of LAs management may be grouped into technical –responsible for repairs and maintenance, and management – responsible mainly for allocations and tenant relations. The technical personnel are in the Works department or the Public Works department, respectively at the District or Regional level. The works department is an in-house unit responsible for maintaining publicly owned buildings. Thus, it has a host of skilled artisans including carpenters, masons, plumbers and electricians who are supposed to carry out repairs and maintenance. “They [Works department] are a blend of people with different expertise that is, estate officers, surveyors, draughtsmen and so on. So they advise us on the management of the public houses” (deputy director, Wa, 2015). The management personnel consist of the allocation committee, which includes the Administrative assistant responsible for day-to day operations, including dealing with tenants. Asked about the adequacy of staff to carry out maintenance, some officers said that they were inadequate.

“[t]hey are not always adequate and even the capacities of the staff. They are not many and then, they also lack capacity so they still have some deficiencies in terms of staff, the department almost fizzled out but it is now that they are given small resources, the works unit are now being integrated” (deputy director, RCC, Wa, 2015). “...we are not

employing, so people are retiring and they are not being replaced...instead of replacing him with somebody who has the skills and competence to do the work, they bring in somebody new who doesn't know anything about estate management. I have it here..." (Estate officer, Housing Ministry, 2015).

In addition to the above, the evidence show that LAs do not have estate officers, even though the Administrative Regulations 1999 of the Civil Service require each Public Works department (PWD) or Works department to have an estate officer. Even though Obeng-Odoom (2011b) found that there is a general lack of professional estate/housing managers. The human resource problems may be more of low recruitment than unavailability of expertise. It is also noted that there is no staff directly related to public housing management. Could it be because there is barely any finance role to perform at the LA authority level? Or the district finance department plays that role? It remains to be seen.

Organisational culture for housing management

The study assessed organisational culture by examining managers' attitude towards the houses and tenants, which is manifest in for example maintenance activities performed, frequency of inspection of houses to identify problems, responses to tenants' complaints, existence and enforcement of minimum standards of maintenance. Asked whether there exist any minimum standard of repair that both tenants and managers to comply with, all the officers said no. An officer said:

"We don't have standards. We don't do any maintenance because they should have been sending us funds, or materials for the maintenance to be taken care of. So, can we hold them [tenants] to account if they don't also repair the houses? The good ones [tenants] take care of minor maintenance..." (Estate officer, RCC, Tamale, 2015).

Still on maintenance, an officer tells how some LAs are getting around the situation of lack of funds:

"we say the minor, minor repairs, you [tenant] will do that yourself. But if it is beyond you [tenant], you have to write to us and if we don't have money to do it we will let our

engineer make the estimates and if you are in the position, you do it and we use it to off-set your rent.” (Housing officer, Navrongo, 2015).

On the question of the attitude of LA managers towards tenants, the majority (30, 75%) said they do not get responses from when they report complaints for repairs. Some tenants said:

“We visit their [LAs] offices to complain as a group formally or individually. But they [LAs] don’t mind us”; “When you report a complain, they don’t do anything at all”; “No need to contact them [LAs] because no attention is paid to tenants in terms of maintenance of the facilities in general”; “I go there to make verbal complaints about the management of the environment and maintenance. But they [LAs] don’t respond to us at all.” (Tenant interviews, 2015).

The evidence show that LA managers respond poorly to complaints and requests to maintain the units; so is their relationship with tenants. This situation does not signal that housing management is driven by any organisational values and attitudes. Furthermore, it points to a situation of low tenant participation, which rather is critical in housing management. After all, tenant satisfaction is the ultimate aim of housing management. The poor organisational culture may be attributed inter alia to the lack of, or inadequate professionals, and lack of requisite training. Frustrations as a result of lack of funds for maintenance and absence of clear guidelines for management may also explain the poor culture.

Quality of public housing

Housing quality relates to houses meeting basic acceptable standards in terms of initial construction and subsequent maintenance. The study found that all the houses are constructed of sandcrete (cement and sand) blocks. Sandcrete block is regarded as durable and a dominant wall construction material, accounting for about 57.5% of housing construction in Ghana (GSS, 2013). Most of the houses were constructed as late as the 1970s. It further found that very minimal maintenance occurs in public housing. The majority of tenants (87.5%) said LAs do not perform their maintenance responsibility. In response to the question of whether the LA maintain their housing stock. Some tenants said:

“they do not maintain the houses, look, the walls are cracked, ceiling is falling off as a result of leaks from the roof, the window frames are weak and everything is falling apart.”; Never has there been anything of the sort for this residence. I pay for all the damages since I moved in here.”; “Most complaints never end anywhere. The story is always the same. No money. Meanwhile, we pay rent”; “The Assembly [LA] is supposed to repair but they would not, and they have refused to allow us repair.” (Tenant interviews, 2015).

The lamentation by LA managers about lack of funds, hence their inability to maintain the houses has been adequately reported. The response from an officer succinctly summarises the impact of non-maintenance. He said: “...for residential, I do not remember the last time PWD was able to do maintenance, with the exception of prestige buildings...because we are not maintaining them, they are deteriorating” (Estate officer, Housing ministry, 2015).

It is obvious that the problem with housing quality is largely due to lack of regular maintenance. The result is that most of the houses are dilapidated as in figures 4 and 5, and to a large extent not suitable for occupation. Most of the houses are in bad physical conditions – showing visibly faded wall painting, rotten wooden components, dysfunctional fittings and fixtures and leaking roofs (See figure 4 and 5). Some tenants described the condition of the houses as follows:

“the roof is old and leaks whenever there is heavy rain. The ceiling is also discoloured. The doors are weak, windows weak, and the nets are torn”; We had to replace the plumbing and some of the electrical fittings, so now its ok”; “the roofing is ‘infected’ with heavy leakages, the doors are broken and windows also broken. The walls are weak and parts of the foundation eroded. Electrical fittings are so poor that they cause problems every now and then”(Tenant interviews, 2015).

The description by tenants of conditions in public housings says it all, that there are challenges with management; these challenges find expression in the conditions of public housing.



Figure 4: Faded painting, cracked walls and rotten ceiling of some public housing units



Figure 5: Public housing flats

6. Summary of challenges and directions for solution

It has been shown in the previous section that public housing management by LAs is fraught with challenges, which have tended to impact negatively on housing conditions. These challenges are summarised in this section and potential directions for solution discussed.

First, there is no adequate policy and regulatory guidance for public housing management. Unlike the Netherlands and England, Acts and regulations have defined the structure and requirements for social or council housing management (Aziabah, 2018). Even though the percentage of social housing

differs greatly in these two countries compared to Ghana, they present important lessons for developing policy and regulations for public housing. Second, there is a poorly defined organisational structure for housing management. This has given grounds for confusion and ineffectiveness in management. Both the CAGD and LAs collect rents. As a result, LAs are not able to fully mobilise rent revenue for maintenance. But, it is more effective to concentrate all operational activities, including rent collection at the LA level for effective utilisation and greater impact. If necessary, central government through the ministry for housing or an agency may supervise management. A similar model used in the Netherlands (where there is a supervisory board, and management and operational units) has proven effective in giving housing associations the independence to operate, and at the same time keeping a close watch at their activities to minimize losses (AEDES, 2016).

Third, LAs do not have the full complement of skilled personnel to manage public houses. The Local Government (Departments of the district assemblies) (Commencement) Instrument 2009, LI1961 requires metropolitan, municipal, and district assemblies to establish Estate departments and have qualified officers manage public property. It appears this requirement has not been fully satisfied. LA could take advantage and engage professionals being by the universities. The requisite artisans will need to be recruited for the Works department and where necessary major maintenance works contracted out. This model has been used in several contexts including Hong Kong (Cheung & Yip, 2003), and the Netherlands (Straub, 2004). It is noted that the trend today is to keep a skeletal maintenance team and contract out much of the especially specialised maintenance. Admittedly, the broader social context must support such a model, and it seems Ghana and most Africa are not yet prepared for it.

Fourth, lack of sustainable source of finance for management and maintenance. The lack of clear and coordinated roles by local and central government largely accounts for this challenge. Without delving into the ability of current rents to sufficiently cover maintenance, the non-transfer of rent revenues to LAs means they cannot maintain (See S. B. Aziabah, 2018). Even though this study did not delve into how LAs utilise the rents they currently collect, the persistent refrain of no money to maintain gives cause for concern. Thus, if LAs succeed to fully collect rent locally, how these rents are spent will be an important issue to address.

Firth, there is poor participation of tenants in housing management. The relationship and attitude of managers towards tenants point to this. There are not spelled out customer care codes for managers. But, the impact of tenant participation in housing management cannot be overestimated. Among others, it promotes accountability, better financial control and reduces the burden of bureaucracy (Lang, 2015). Tenant participation has led to enhanced service delivery and higher satisfaction among tenants in public or social housing (Redmond & Norris, 2007; Wong, 2006; Yip, 2001). Structures must be in place to promote tenant participation. Such structures may be spelled out in law or by regulation as is the case in public housing in Hong Kong, the Netherlands and England (Aziabah, 2018).

7. Conclusion

The role of public housing in addressing the ever increasing housing deficit cannot be overemphasized. That notwithstanding, housing actors have decried the quality and conditions of public housing in Ghana, blaming it on poor management and maintenance. This paper examined the challenges of public housing management in Ghana. It addressed the questions: how is public housing by LAs currently organised? How can the organisation of public housing be analysed? And what challenges confront the organisation and practice of housing management by LAs in Ghana?

The paper finds that public rental housing management is embedded in local government administration, with central government, through the Controller and Accountant General's Department being involved in rent collection. The study used the adapted 7S based model as a framework to analyse housing management by LAs and identified the following challenges. First, there is no adequate policy and regulatory framework for public housing management. Second, the organisational structure is poorly defined. As a result, there is lack of coordination among actors in management. Third, the financial structure is poorly outlined; consequently, LAs are not able to collect all rents and apply them to housing management. Fourth, LAs do not have the full complement of competent housing professionals and artisans to manage and maintain public houses; and fifth, there is poor tenant participation in housing management. All these challenges act collectively to produce the quality and conditions prevailing in public housing today. These challenges are not peculiar to the Ghanaian context; many other African countries face similar challenges. It

is hoped that this paper stimulates discourse among experts and practitioners to find enduring solutions to them.

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