



Towards Habitat III: Confronting the disjuncture between global policy and local practice on Africa's 'challenge of slums'



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ABSTRACT

The 'challenge of slums' is a global challenge, but particularly acute in Sub-Saharan Africa where in 2001 71.9% of the urban population lived in slums. This article reviews the housing programmes of a selected number of African countries (Angola, Namibia, Ethiopia and South Africa) to argue that while until recently African shelter policies at least in name continued to be mostly in line with international enabling and participatory approaches to dealing with the challenge of slums, in practice mass scaled supply-driven approaches to housing provision are on the rise. The article situates this practice historically and seeks to provide insight into some of the perceptions and factors that have underpinned and enabled its emergence. While noting a number of shortcomings of this supply-driven approach, it concludes that with Habitat III on the horizon it is important to confront the disjuncture between global policy and local practice in African cities.

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1. Introduction

Despite the global nature of the challenge of slums, it is the most acute in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). In 2001, 71.9% of the urban population in SSA was living in slums, which represents the largest proportion of the urban population resident in slums in the developing world (UN-Habitat, 2003). Currently, about 40% of the African population lives in cities. Overall urban growth rates indicate that by 2030 this will have risen to over half of the sub-continent's population (UNDESA, 2014). Despite high economic growth over the past ten years, income levels on the sub-continent remain amongst the lowest in the developing world. Around 50% of Africans continue to have incomes below US\$ 1.25 per day, while only 4% receive more than US\$10 per day (UN-Habitat, 2014: 19). The dual pressures of a growing urban population and pervasive poverty mean that African governments face a growing challenge of providing shelter for the poor. In 2014, UN-Habitat described Africa's urban housing shortage as 'acute' (UN-Habitat, 2014).

Government responses to housing provision in post-colonial

SSA have changed and evolved over time, largely in accordance with international housing policies. In broad terms these phases reflect an overarching shift from 'supply' to 'support' driven policies (Stren, 1990; Wakely, 1988). Since the 2000s, these international policies have become more variegated, while remaining essentially support driven in nature. This includes a focus on tenure and participatory upgrading in informal settlements with a view of eradicating slums and building sustainable human settlements, in line with the Habitat Agenda adopted after the Habitat II conference held in 1996. Habitat III, to be held in 2016, is expected to consolidate and affirm these goals.

Until recently, African shelter policies continued to be mostly in line with international housing policies, at least in name. However, an analysis of emerging housing programmes in a number of selected African countries shows that in practice mass scaled supply-driven approaches to housing development, as opposed to more enabling and participatory approaches, are making a return.

An emerging literature is recognizing this trend but criticizes these programmes from a planning perspective as producing 'urban fantasies' (Watson, 2013) or, in the case of already implemented projects, as reproducing outdated solutions to urban problems and therefore doomed to fail (Buckley, Kallergis, & Wainer, 2015). Rather than critiquing current emerging practices,

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this article aims to situate current trends historically by reviewing the evolution of housing policies over time. This allows for an understanding of current practice as a response to the failure of previous policies. Secondly, it seeks to provide insight into some of the perceptions and factors that have underpinned and enabled the emergence of a supply driven approach to housing development. Preliminary evidence on the progress made on the implementation of a number of housing programmes across the sub-continent nevertheless indicates a number of shortcomings related to the affordability and sustainability of this emerging approach.

The paper will start with a review of international housing policy and practice from the 1950s to the 1990s, before exploring current policy and practice in four selected African countries: Angola, Namibia, Ethiopia and South Africa.¹ With Habitat III on the horizon, the paper concludes by arguing that instead of trying to force African housing practice in line with international best practice there is a need for a better understanding of what is causing the gap between policy and practice in African cities in order to identify the best possible ways to overcome this disjuncture.

2. Housing policy and practice in SSA from the 1950s–1990s

Housing policy trends in Sub-Saharan Africa are not linear, they sometimes overlap and cannot be seen to always have been uniformly promoted by international donors nor applied by African governments (Harris & Giles, 2003). Nevertheless, three phases of international housing policy between the 1950s and 1990s are generally identified in the literature. In broad terms these phases reflect an overarching shift from 'supply' to 'support' driven policies (Stren, 1990; Wakely, 1988).

Approaches to housing in the 1950s and 1960s were defined by the modernisation paradigm of the time which saw an interventionist role for the state and modern cities as the engine of development, while functioning as a tool of power and social control (Dalberto et al., 2013; Njoh, 2009). In line with modernist thinking, most of the newly independent countries in Africa dealt with growth through a combination of urban master planning, slum clearance and the development of public and state-developed rental housing in order to fill the gap between supply and demand for formal housing (Stren, 1990). However, throughout the 1960s it became increasingly clear that slum clearance and formal housing provision was too costly and not benefitting the poorest urban residents.² According to one estimate, the rate of the total formal sector (direct government plus official approved) construction usually did not exceed 5% of annual urban demand, while the cost of construction was not less than three to four times those of informally built houses (Lewin, 1976 cited by Okpala, 1986: 212).

¹ This review is based on a search for scholarly publications in the field of housing in Sub-Saharan Africa conducted between February and May 2015, yielding about 150 publications. The search focussed mostly on English language publications in the field of housing, but an effort was made to include publications on Anglophone, Lusophone as well as Francophone Sub-Saharan African countries. Seminal works in the sector, as well as relevant experiences from other regions were also sourced and referenced. Emphasis was placed on finding peer-reviewed publications (mainly journal papers, book chapters and conference papers), but important non-academic publications (eg. government policy documents or development agency reports) and media records were also included in the search.

² South Africa is different from most other post-colonial African countries because it only became democratic in 1994 with the end of institutionalized racial segregation or apartheid. This means that while most post-colonial African countries started to adopt more tolerant, alternative approaches to countering informal settlement growth over time, the South African government continued to demolish informal settlements and exercise strict control over urbanization throughout the late-apartheid period (Wilkinson, 1998).

These financial constraints, coupled with an increasing recognition by international donors of the importance of informal housing construction, led to the adoption of approaches to support self-help building in the early 1970s.³ The World Bank took a leading role in aided self-help, an approach that generally is seen to have originated in the research and experience in Latin America of the British architect John Turner (1968, 1969); also Abrams (1964), Turner and Mangin (1963), Mangin (1967). Other international development agencies like UNCHS (Habitat) and UNDP later followed suit (Pugh, 1997).⁴

The version of self-help adopted by the World Bank simultaneously applied the concepts of slum upgrading and sites-and-services in the latter half of the 1970s (Pillay, 1995). Slum upgrading meant a number of different things, but is generally associated by an in-situ improvement in an area through the granting of secure tenure and the provision of basic services.

In spite of the influence of Turner's work on international housing policy, his ideas became increasingly subject to both theoretical and empirical critique (Mathéy, 1992). Regarding the projects themselves, Payne (1984) notes the following problems that were common to both sites-and-services and slum upgrading:

- downward-raiding on improved sites by middle-income households;
- the requirement for cheap land resulting in developments on peripherally located, or poor quality land;
- rent increases due to increased services making renting unaffordable;
- vested interests of officials disrupting the process;
- demands for higher-quality housing;
- conflicts between various levels of government;
- high standards and administrative inflexibility making sites expensive, or too basic;
- projects taking too long to plan and initiate.

In a review of its own projects, the World Bank (1978: 16) concluded that sites-and-services were generally too expensive to be afforded by the poorest 20% of urban families.

In the early 1980s World Bank lending moved away from sites-and-services and up-grading projects to a more programmatic approach which involved the creation of and support for housing finance institutions as well as a focus on institutional reform and development. This move was accompanied by a decrease in lending to SSA. Between 1972 and 1981, lending to SSA as a percentage of total shelter lending was 23.18%. This decreased from 7.57% between 1982 and 1991 to a mere 1.20% between 1992 and 2005. In absolute terms, lending dropped from approximately \$500 million in the 1980s to approximately \$80 million in the 1990s (Buckley & Kalarickal, 2006: 19–21).

In its first *Global Report on Human Settlements*, UN-Habitat introduced what was called an 'enabling approach' to housing development which involved the provision of a legislative, institutional, and financial framework through which the private sector,

³ According to Fox (2014), the 1970s also saw the emergence of an anti-urbanization bias in development discourse. He detects signs of internalizing this bias by African governments and argues that this served to encourage a *laissez-faire* approach to urban governance despite the rapid and persistent growth of urban populations in the region.

⁴ It also has been argued that aided self-help goes back to early 20th century Europe, where it arose as an ad hoc response to housing shortages after the First World War, and that it started to be developed and promoted in the developing world from the early 1940s onwards by US agencies, the United Nations and the British Colonial Office. This included support for aided self-help in British colonies such as Ghana and Kenya (Harris, 1998; 1999).

communities and individuals could effectively develop the urban housing sector (UNCHS, 1987). In 1996, the Habitat II conference launched the 'Habitat Agenda' a collaborative approach that combined elements from the UN's original statement of enablement in 1986 and the World Bank's more market-based enabling policies. The Istanbul Declaration (UN-Habitat, 1996) adopted the goal of adequate shelter for all with a focus on poverty alleviation and environmental management and the development of sustainable human settlements through existing and new partnerships at the international, national and local level.

3. Housing policy and practice in SSA in the 2000s

Policies to housing development in the 2000s build on the shift initiated in the previous decade away from housing to a focus on planning and related themes. This culminated in the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000. As part of Goal 7 of the MDGs, Target 11 calls for 'significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by the year of 2020'.⁵ This is reinforced in the 2003 UN-Habitat report on human settlements entitled *The Challenge of Slums*, which found that 71.9% of the urban population in SSA lived in poorly built overcrowded housing without adequate basic service provision and secure tenure (UN-Habitat, 2003).

Central to overcoming this 'challenge of slums' has therefore been a renewed focus on tenure and upgrading. The link between secure tenure and poverty reduction had already been recognized in previous housing policies. It was reinforced in 1999 with the launch by UN-Habitat of the *Global Campaign for Secure Tenure* together with the *Global Campaign on Urban Governance*. However, it gained even more attention after the publication of the book *The mystery of capital: why capitalism triumphs in the West and fails everywhere else* by the Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto (2000). De Soto's work was received with high-level political support and acclaim in the US and the UK and led to the wide-spread support for and adoption of home ownership and land-titling programmes across SSA. However, research indicates that in practice there are many limits to land titling, as titles are often costly and do not take into account the workings of informal land and housing markets (eg. Buckley & Kalarickal, 2006; Kingwill et al., 2006; Payne, Durand-Lasserve, & Rakodi, 2009).

Similarly, the available evidence on participatory slum upgrading indicates that while Western donors advocate for this approach as the most affordable and 'often the best option of all' (UN-Habitat, 2013; also UN-Habitat and Cities Alliance, 2011), results of programmes such as the UN funded Slum Upgrading Facility (SUF) and the Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme (PSUP) created in 2004 and 2008 respectively in practice have been uneven and uncertain on the longer term (eg. Karaoglou, 2013; UN-Habitat, 2014b). This is in line with other studies that have shown that in many African countries, upgrading programmes have continued to face limitations in terms of scale, local government capacity and problems related to community participation on the ground (Gulyani & Connors, 2002). Moreover, critics have argued that the focus on 'cities without slums' has legitimized continued slum eradication or the relocation of people out of slums to peripheral locations, which has significant negative social impacts (Berrisford & Kihato, 2006; see also Huchzermeyer, 2011).

Meanwhile, the new millennium ushered in an era of 'Africa rising', with GDP rates increasing at twice the rate of the 1980s and 1990s, higher levels of foreign trade and investment and a growing

middle class (AfDB, 2011). Combined with increasing urban growth rates, this has opened up both challenges and opportunities resulting from the mounting pressure on existing housing stocks and infrastructures. It is in this context that the emergence of mass-scaled supply-driven approaches to housing provision must be seen. The next section outlines the recent adoption and implementation of housing programmes in Angola, Namibia, Ethiopia and South Africa.

4. A review of mass housing programmes in SSA

Angola's National Urbanism and Housing Programme was launched in 2009 with the aim of building one million houses as a response to the country's massive housing backlog caused by decades of unassisted urbanization due to the civil war. Post-war reconstruction, financed through the country's oil wealth, brought about double digit GDP growth but also increasing urban growth rates. With an average annual urban growth rate of 5.79% between 2005 and 2010, over the past decade the population of the capital of Luanda doubled to about 6.5 million (GoA, 2014; UN-Habitat, 2008). UN-Habitat (2014a) estimates that 86.5% of Angola's urban population lives in slums. The targets of the government's housing programme consisted of 685,000 that were to be constructed through state-led self-help building, 115,000 houses by the government, 120,000 by the private sector and 80,000 through cooperatives (GoA, 2009). The upgrading of parts of the city of Luanda was also announced. However, so far housing development has mainly consisted of the construction of mass scale turnkey housing projects by the government. This includes the Kilamba new city project, which has been financed through an oil-backed loan, built by Chinese contractors and managed by a special presidential agency. In 2011, the construction of the first 20,000 apartments in this city was completed. This approach to housing development has resulted in the delivery of over 70,000 housing units in the capital of Luanda alone, as well as the construction of additional 'new cities' in selected provinces. Access (mainly through rent-to-buy schemes) has been heavily subsidized by the state as prices that were initially established proved to be unaffordable (Cain, 2014). Preliminary research indicates that the new housing projects in Luanda experience problems ranging from basic service provision, maintenance of the buildings and public areas in the projects and transport to areas of employment (Cain, Croese, & Pitcher, 2014).

In line with previous policies, the main focus of Namibia's National Housing Policy adopted in 2009 was the upgrading of informal settlement areas (Republic of Namibia, 2009; Sweeney-Bindels, 2011). At about 35% the slum incidence in Namibia is relatively low, but the country has been rapidly urbanizing with about 40% of the urban population living in the capital of Windhoek (UN-Habitat, 2014a). However, with the adoption of a National Mass Housing Programme in 2013 the government's focus has shifted to state-led housing delivery. Under this Programme, the Namibian government aims to build 185,000 affordable houses throughout the country by 2030 through the use of government funds and public-private partnerships (The Namibian Presidency, 2013). During the first two years, at least 8800 housing units would have to be built and 10,200 plots would have to be serviced in order to contribute to the goal of 'eliminating all shacks' from urban and peri-urban areas. There is no research on the performance of the programme so far, but preliminary indications are that the programme has been fraught with implementation difficulties, labour exploitation, mismanagement and corruption, as well as housing prices out of reach of the poor (Ndimbira, 2014).

While Ethiopia remains a largely rural society, the country has been rapidly urbanizing in recent years on the back of sustained

⁵ See for an overview of goals, targets and indicators the UN Millennium Project website: <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/goals/gti.htm>.

GDP growth. Slum incidence rates are high with 79.1% of the population currently living in slums, although this is down from 95.5% in 1995 (UN-Habitat, 2014a). Slum upgrading approaches prevailed in Ethiopia from the 1970s to the mid-2000s. In 2005, the Ethiopian government shifted to state-led housing delivery through the launch of the Integrated Housing Development Programme with the goal of building 400,000 condominium units. By 2011, 171,000 units had been built, mostly in the capital of Addis Ababa. Houses were sold through government subsidized mortgages in order to secure affordability (Ayenew & Martin, 2009). Nevertheless, the Programme has experienced a number of challenges. These are related to the affordability of the units for low-income households, the practice of renting out of units due to the inability to pay monthly mortgage and service payments, the location of condominium sites at the periphery of the city far from employment opportunities placing financial strain on beneficiaries, as well as the quality and design of blocks and post-occupancy management (UN-Habitat, 2011).

South Africa's housing programme was launched in 1994 with the aim of providing redress for the black population that was deprived from adequate housing under apartheid (Huchzermeyer, 2001; Wilkinson, 1998). To date, over three million houses have been built by the government, but about 30% of the South African population still lives in slums (HDA, 2013; Shisaka, 2011; UN-Habitat, 2014a). Over the past ten years, numerous efforts have been made to move away from supply side delivery. The Breaking New Ground Policy of 2004 introduced the Upgrading Informal Settlements Programme (UISP) while the National Outcomes Approach adopted in 2010 set the target to upgrade 400,000 informal settlement households by 2014 (South African Department of Housing, 2004; The South African Presidency, 2010). However, assessments suggest that state efforts continue to preference mass-scale provision of houses over upgrading (South African Department of Human Settlements, 2015; Tissington, 2011). This trend has been exacerbated by the recent target of 1.5 million houses to be built by 2019, set by the South African minister of Human Settlements. To achieve this, the department has announced a strategy to develop housing 'mega-projects', which has already been adopted in Gauteng, the most populous and urban province in the country (SA News Agency, 2015). Preliminary indications are that these projects tend to be peripheral greenfield developments, some of which are referred to as 'new cities'.⁶

5. Discussion

The housing programmes discussed above are not exhaustive. An overview of housing finance in Africa by CAHF (2015) points to similar mass government-led housing initiatives in Botswana, Zimbabwe and even Eritrea. Moreover, the housing programmes are at different stages of implementation, they have different scales and reflect different urban and economic realities. Nevertheless, their commonalities point to a growing trend towards mass-scale housing development that, similar to the 1950s and 1960s, is led by the state. Housing programmes have a particular urban approach with housing predominantly being built in capital cities. Most houses are for sale, reflecting a concern with the importance of ownership and they are heavily subsidized by the state in order to make them affordable to what is seen as the low-income population. This reflects some of the common assumptions that

underpin housing policy-making in Africa (Tippie, 2015).

Nevertheless, preliminary evidence on the housing initiatives that have been implemented in the above mentioned countries indicates that state delivered houses have been unaffordable to most of the urban population. While resource rich countries such as Angola, Namibia and South Africa have GDPs that put them in the middle income country category with Ethiopia having experienced rapid GDP growth, in all countries inequality levels are high and urban populations predominantly poor. As a result, in 2012 the Angolan government saw itself forced to lower prices for apartments in the newly built housing settlements and introduce subsidized rental and rent-to-buy schemes in order to attract occupants (Angonoticias, 2012). In response to complaints about the price of government houses, the Namibian government announced in 2014 that it would provide subsidies for the purchase of specific categories of houses, with a view to affordability and substantively addressing the housing backlog (Ndimbira, 2014; Pohamba, 2014). The Ethiopian housing programme has faced similar issues of affordability. Even with low-interest loans, the down payment and monthly payments of houses are not affordable to 80 per cent of the population (Curran, 2007 cited in Ayenew & Martin, 2009: 26). This suggests that, in line with experiences elsewhere, there is a big gap between the housing that states are developing and the effective demand amongst the urban poor. In countries such as China, Mexico and Egypt, but also in Western European countries such as Spain and Ireland this gap has led to massive housing vacancies (López Moreno and González Blanco, 2014).

Still, the scale of the housing challenge results in a preference of direct supply over enabling or incremental approaches to housing development such as slum upgrading. According to a study by UN-Habitat, slum upgrading was not a priority in Ethiopia's Housing Programme as 'many officials and local professionals believe that slum upgrading 'does not work' in Ethiopia because of the massive deficit that such small-scale programmes cannot address, and the need to increase density on valuable inner-city land' (UN-Habitat, 2011: 9). Namibia's mass housing programme has been justified in similar terms: 'Namibia continues to experience an acute shortage of affordable housing, a situation that has reached a socio-economic crisis proportion and hence warrants an extraordinary public policy response' (The Namibian Presidency, 2013: 3). This may explain why most of the housing programmes reviewed above are driven by the country's presidency or at ministerial level, rather than by local government. A centralized approach to housing provision tends to be seen as more time- as well as cost-effective. In South Africa, a proposal for a new permit regime to compel developers to develop housing for lower-income families was abandoned in 2015 to make way for mega residential projects implemented through 'one-stop' housing development agencies. In the words of the Minister of Human Settlements: "We are no longer going to be building small townships because it is a waste of money so we going mega projects (sic)" (Thakali, 2015).

Indeed, the provision of basic infrastructure such as water, sanitation, roads, drainage and common facilities to informal settlements under small-scale or upgrading programmes is estimated to cost three times the amount of extending bulk infrastructure to large formal housing developments (UN-Habitat and Cities Alliance, 2011). The costs of construction are often also reduced by building on cheap land in the city's periphery, even if this increases costs for residents to commute between their place of residence and employment, which often continues to be in the city centre.

When the costs of state-led housing delivery became too high in the 1960s, funding became available from Western donors to support self-help building. However, since the 1980s this funding has been decreasing while the results of on-going programmes

⁶ See the Gauteng City-Region Observatory's map indicating the location of the proposed mega-housing developments (June 2015), available at http://www.gcro.ac.za/media/reports/6_GCRO_map_of_the_month_GEMF_housing_mega_projects_June_2015.pdf.

upgrading are mixed. In this context, the availability of finance from new emerging players such as China, who do not interfere in domestic policy agendas, represents a new opportunity. This has allowed resource rich countries such as Angola to use their resources in exchange for the mass-scale construction of infrastructures, such as mass housing projects (Croese, 2012). The entry of private (foreign) capital has also played a role in the emergence of plans for the construction of new satellite cities and mega infrastructural projects, which are similar in scale and ambition to those implemented in the early years of independence (see eg. Potts, 1985). Examples include plans for the redevelopment of the capital of Rwanda Kigali, the new Tatu and Konza Techno City in Kenya, Hope City in Ghana, Kigamboni City in Tanzania and the Cité le Fleuve in the DRC (UN-Habitat, 2014a; Watson, 2013). South Africa counts plans for at least two new cities in the province of Gauteng alone: Waterfall City and Lanseria Airport City, as well as a new satellite town in the Western Cape. While many of these 'new city' plans may never be (fully) realized, critics have pointed to the exclusionary nature of the spaces envisaged by this type of 'privatized urbanism' (Herbert & Murray, 2015, see also de Boeck, 2011; Cirolia, 2014).

Meanwhile, international financial institutions such as the World Bank have started to recognize that large scale investment in infrastructure is needed to enable and sustain economic transformation (Foster and Briceño-Garmendia, 2010). In May 2015, the private sector lending arm of the World Bank, IFC, announced support for Chinese low-cost housing construction in Kenya, Rwanda and Nigeria (Xinhua, 2015). Private consultancy firms such as McKinsey in turn have started to advocate for industrial approaches that in the face of rapid urbanization deliver housing quickly, on a large scale and at the desired cost (Woetzel, Ram, Mischke, Garemo, & Sankhe, 2014).

However, in spite of the increasing availability of finance for housing development most African countries tend to rely on domestic savings and government debt for housing development, for instance through development assistance or collateral loans (Buckley et al., 2015). Researchers from the World Bank have found that on the longer term, unlike high-income OECD countries which tend to lever capital markets by tapping foreign savings, this may increase the sensitivity of housing investment to the cyclical growth of gross domestic product, while also potentially crowding out investments in health and education (Dasgupta, Lall, & Lozano-Gracia, 2014).

6. Conclusion: confronting the disjuncture

The formulation of housing policies in post-colonial SSA has been historically influenced by the support of international donors and organizations. Since the 1950s various phases can be distinguished which in broad terms illustrate a shift from supply to support policies and practices. However, in practice housing policies have had relatively little impact, contributing only minimally to the production of formal housing and not structurally changing the enabling environment. This has resulted in massive housing backlogs.

The supply-driven housing programmes that are currently emerging in countries such as Angola, Namibia, Ethiopia and South Africa constitute a response to these backlogs. While global enabling housing policy discourses are still reproduced locally, in practice governments prefer mass scale direct state-led housing provision over upgrading programmes which are not seen as effectively meeting housing needs. Direct housing provision is also enabled by increasing economic growth rates and a changed global landscape which has introduced countries to new global players such as China and foreign private capital.

While the housing programmes have been implemented in different ways and are still on-going, making it difficult to draw final conclusions, all seem to have experienced the same kind of problems related to maintenance, management and affordability. Nevertheless, they show that many government driven housing programmes are effectively being translated to reality, even if they are only reaching a small segment of the population. Conflating these programmes with plans for privately funded new cities as part of a single project therefore loses the nuances of the trend. While the shortcomings and challenges of current approaches must be noted, there is a need to query and further study the causes and drivers of the current return to supply-type provision practices.

In recent years, UN-Habitat has come to acknowledge that previous enablement policies have not effectively tackled the housing challenge and that there is a need for government to reassume a leadership role in housing provision (UN-Habitat, 2013, 2015). The upcoming discussions on housing at Habitat III will therefore certainly benefit from a more grounded understanding of the ways in which African governments have started to reassume this role and the need for the design of shelter policies that are in touch with local realities.

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