

TENEMENT HOUSING IN NAIROBI: ITS GROWTH AND QUALITY

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Abstract

Urban expansion has happened fast in Nairobi in the past 100 years and with it uncontrolled housing developments that are inadequate, unsatisfactory and a major challenge to the built environment. One such housing type is the tenement, which is a high-rise block consisting of single-room dwellings with shared facilities. Rapid development of the tenement sector points to its popularity as a housing option in Nairobi. It is one form of informal housing that is unregulated and which is presenting a new urban lifestyle that is perceived to be superior to that of slums, mainly by the upper echelons of the low-income class. This group is on the rise thus increasing demand for this housing type and consequently providing an opportunity for the private sector to profit from the tenement investment. This residential transformation is happening rapidly in tandem with the city's growth and is currently raising concern about the physical quality of housing and domestic life.

This paper explores tenements through a review of their growth and quality through a focus of interests and housing quality indicators. It further reflects upon the possible interventions to streamline this housing sector. The paper follows a case study approach that uses purposefully selected tenement settlements in Nairobi that best illustrate this phenomenon. The research findings indicate that the proliferation of tenements is a consequence of inadequate supply of affordable housing for the low-income population by state authorities that has created opportunity for private sector investment in tenements. It is also a consequence of low wages for a majority of urban dwellers, wages that in the prevailing economic reality cannot afford adequate housing. Further, it is a factor of politicizations of the housing sector that has tolerated inept building practices, making investment in tenements profitable. Further, the research observes that the issues of tenement housing could be redressed through policy, administrative action and improvement to existing housing.