



Downtown Monrovia.

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Constraints of today's tenant in Liberia

Liberia is a country in West Africa bordered by Sierra Leone to its west, Guinea to its north and Ivory Coast to its east and is home to about 4 million people. Twelve years after the Liberian civil war, 1989–1996, Liberians are still struggling to have roofs over their heads.



The war claimed the lives of more than 200,000 Liberians and displaced a million others into refugee camps in neighbouring countries, and also destroyed homes, commercial properties and infrastructure.

The most affected by poor housing conditions are the civil servants, students, immigrants from neigh-

bouring countries and the unemployed, as well as key workers such as teachers, nurses and drivers. A civil servant like a police officer in Liberia earns a monthly pay of about US\$90, without any kind of incentive. Obviously this kind of salary will not sustain any one shouldering family responsibilities. The government has been called upon to think of the needs of its citizens, especially housing. A petition for a housing court is in progress for fair hearings for thousands of forced eviction cases.

The lack of housing has compelled people to continue residing in available uncompleted, abandoned, and dilapidated buildings. Quick impact structures keep popping up, thereby expanding slum locations and sizes.

Liberia is 168 years old, and still cannot boast of any existing national housing policy or a plan for social housing for its citizens. The National Housing Authority is not effective and lacks the requisite background in civil works and housing issues. The Authority has no single plan, no programs, and no drive to seek better solutions to the need for adequate housing of desperate citizens.

As the government of Liberia is playing poker games with citizen imbedded rights for social amenities so as the National Housing Authority is an empty shell, whose staff lacks the requisite background in civil works and housing issues plights.

There were a few government social housing units in various parts/townships of Monrovia built in the late 70s and 80s/90s by former Presidents Tolbert and Samuel Doe. But they have been sold to long time occupants and since then there is no plan to develop new low cost housing estates by the present administration.

Many individual mini estates have, in recent years, sprung up in various corners of Monrovia built by a few realtors. These are commercial estates with rents as high as US\$150–300 monthly, with leasing agreements at 2 years and beyond. This is of course unattainable for most Liberians. With this development average Liberians are forced to live in shacks. Liberians need low cost housing units for low income earners, with affordable rents around US\$60–100 a month. However many houses are constructed for sale and these cost between US\$10,000–US\$20,000. Few Liberians can afford that kind of money, considering the current state of the economy.

Garbage removal has always been a problem in Liberia. Tenants at various individual renting homes try to be responsible and garbage generation and systems of collection have improved over recent years. Though there is no government collection, there are small businesses specialising in garbage collection, rendering door-to-door services. With this



PHOTO: JACOB E. BRIGHT

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improved system, tenants endure stress free garbage management. The old systems of burning and burying garbage have dwindled. Therefore at the very low fee of 25 cents, one's garbage will be picked up and disposed of properly. With this improved methodology, tenants at various locations/communities have grouped themselves together to deal and mediate on issues that may arise with these services.

Forced evictions have been common but have been reduced in recent years. Since the government paid off illegal occupants in one of their buildings, called the Old General Hospital in Monrovia, other similar actions have been taken by other corporate entities thus reducing the rate of forced eviction. But still some evictions do take place in respect of private land and buildings.

Tenants and the housing situation in Liberia still need government attention. Housing issues are still unattended and tough times are looming.



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