Failed top-down policies in housing: The cases of Nairobi and Santo Domingo

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In the past, various strategies based on top-down approaches were employed to curb the housing crisis in less developed countries (LDCs), but most failed because they did not engage the community in development projects. During the 1980s, the UN launched the bottom-up approach, which emphasizes the involvement of community-based organizations in shelter projects. This approach promotes enabling strategies in an effort to overcome obstacles encountered under the top-down approach: namely displacement, affordability, cost-recovery, and replicability. This paper explores what LDCs are doing to implement the bottom-up approach, and this is accomplished by examining the cases of Nairobi, Kenya, and Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic. The study analyzes how the governments of both countries have responded to the policies promoted under the two approaches. Data on government policies are analyzed to find out whether the governments of Kenya and the Dominican Republic have provided an enabling environment for other actors. This study reveals that both governments have adopted enabling policies in their National Action Plans which include: facilitating the efforts of all actors in providing shelter; the use of non-conventional building materials; and the upgrading of low-income housing. This research shows that the bottom-up approach is more likely to be successful in overcoming factors that inhibit the provision of low-income housing as compared to the top-down approach.

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Introduction

The provision of low-income housing in less developed countries (LDCs) has been an ongoing problem for decades. Governments in these countries and international donor agencies have employed various strategies in an effort to curb the housing crisis. In the past, these strategies were based on top-down approaches, that included the demolition of illegal structures, the provision of sites and services, and the upgrading of squatter settlements. These top-down approaches were employed to ease housing shortages in LDCs because international agencies and governments in these countries assumed that people did not know their needs and communities were unable and unwilling to pay for services (UN, 1976; UNCHS, 1989, 1991a; World Bank, 1993; Pugh, 1994a; Aldrich and Sandhu, 1995; UNCHS and ILO, 1995; Pugh, 1997).

Towards the end of the 1980s, the UN viewed the human settlement policies introduced during the 1970s as better than previous policies but acknowledged that these had also failed to solve the settlement problem (UNCHS, 1987). In particular, housing policies failed to resolve the problems of displacement, affordability, cost-recovery and replicability (World Bank, 1993; UNCHS, 1996b). Scholars argued that most of these policies failed because they did not engage the community in the planning, decision-making and implementation processes (Pugh, 1994a; UNCHS and ILO, 1995).

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During the 1980s, the UN – hoping to overcome problems encountered under the top-down approach – began promoting an enabling or bottom-up approach. While the top-down approach stresses macro-level strategies in development projects, the enabling approach emphasizes micro-level strategies and also recognizes the contributions of women and the poor in development projects. The enabling approach also emphasizes the need to involve communities in shelter projects and, therefore, the success of housing provision depends heavily on community-based organizations (CBOs: UNCHS, 1991b, 1996a; World Bank, 1993). The objective of this paper is to analyze what less developed countries (LDCs) are doing to implement the current global housing policy – the bottom-up or enabling approach. Given the global adoption of both, a comparative analysis is called for. Such a study can reveal the impact of diverse local issues on a global policy and offer solutions to the housing crisis in several cities. This is accomplished by examining the cases of Nairobi in Kenya, and Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic. The paper analyzes how both governments have responded to the policies promoted under the two approaches. This study explores why both countries failed to provide adequate housing in both cities when they employed top-down strategies, and it also analyzes enabling policies, advocated by both countries in their National Action Plans.

This study tries to answer the following questions:

1. Which policies advocated under the enabling approach are promoted by both the Governments of Kenya and the Dominican Republic to facilitate the provision of housing for the poor?
2. Which of these policies will facilitate the efforts of all actors in the shelter sector to provide housing for the poor?
3. Do both governments advocate similar strategies to solving the housing crisis?

The Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000 (GSS) and Agenda 21, both advocated by the UN, were two major policies that influenced housing programs during the 1990s. According to the UNCHS and ILO (1995), the GSS was supposed to help all countries improve their shelter policies to accommodate the needs of all, especially the poor, prior to 2000, while Agenda 21 urged governments and NGOs to support the poor and the unemployed by placing high priority on catering to their shelter and employment needs. To adopt an enabling approach in the shelter sector is the main purpose of the GSS. “Enablement is defined as providing the legislative, institutional, and financial framework” that help all actors engaged in the housing sector to be more efficient (Pugh, 1994a, p. 166). Unlike top-down approaches, enabling strategies do not begin by estimating housing needs but by listing the measures to be taken to enable communities to help themselves (UNCHS, 1987).

In order to facilitate CBO efforts and to curb the shelter crisis, governments have to fix market failures by changing land and housing policies, providing technical and financial assistance and revising inhibiting policies (World Bank, 1991). Governments also have to create a variety of new housing institutions by working jointly with public agencies, the private sector, CBOs and NGOs; and to apply policies and programs that cater to the needs of the poor and that involve them in decision-making. The World Bank recommends that governments take on an enabling role by “[moving] away from producing, financing, and maintaining housing, and toward improving housing market efficiency and the housing conditions of the poor” (World Bank, 1993, p. 7). Such policies urge governments to act as enablers by removing legal constraints that do not encourage the construction of shelter, but instead support and encourage the participation of all actors in the shelter sector, especially CBOs. According to Mosha (1995), empowering and enabling CBOs in urban projects gives communities a sense of ownership; promotes public awareness; reinforces urban management instruments; promotes transparency in development projects; and promotes community participation in the provision of services and environmental protection.

The success of CBOs depends on how well other actors in the shelter sector carry out their roles and cooperate with each other. The interaction between all actors is crucial because each group contributes to the housing sector and they all depend on each other (UNCHS and ILO, 1995; UNCHS, 1991a, 1998; Turner, 1996; Vakil, 1999; Kigochie, 2001; Muraya, 2002; Otiso, 2003; Muraya, 2006). Actors in the housing sector include central and local governments, NGOs, the private sector, CBOs and the households themselves. CBOs are organizations based on community participation working with households to provide or upgrade shelter for low-income groups. NGOs act as enablers by working with CBOs directly, as mediators between CBOs and governmental and international authorities, and as advisors to state institutions on policy change. The private sector, which includes both formal and informal enterprises, is made up of commercial firms, professional organizations or associations, and financial institutions (UNCHS and ILO, 1995; World Bank, 1993; Pugh, 1994b). Figure 1 demonstrates suggested roles of various actors and the interactions among them as advocated in the enabling approach.

The following section of the paper is an overview of factors that have contributed to the housing shortages in both Nairobi and Santo Domingo; it then discusses various housing policies advocated under the top-down approach that were employed by both countries. This discussion is followed by a comparison of enabling policies employed by both governments in their National Action Plans. The conclusion includes suggestions for further research.
Factors contributing to the housing shortage in Nairobi and Santo Domingo

The main characteristics and current extent and patterns of low-income housing in both Nairobi and Santo Domingo can be attributed to the shortage of housing experienced in both cities before and after independence and the strategies that have been employed to ease the shelter crisis. The cities have failed to curb the housing shortage for almost identical reasons. In the past, policies employed in both countries failed to meet the high demand for housing because they supported rigid building standards, neglected the needs of the poor, and resulted in expensive units (Etherton, 1971; van Zwanenberg, 1972; Muwonge, 1980; Gómez et al., 1984; Kayongo-Male, 1988; PLD, 1996; El Partido, 2000). In addition, various factors, including lack of funds, poor management, and planning, also affect the provision of low-income housing in both Nairobi and Santo Domingo, but rapid rural to urban migration, unemployment and shortage of low-cost housing units have been the main causes of the housing crisis in both cities (Werlin, 1974; Muwonge, 1980; Lee-Smith, 1984; Pons, 1994). In their study, Gómez et al. (1984) also argue that lack of a national housing plan or policy before the 1970s, and unequal distribution of land in urban areas contributed to the shortage of low-income housing in the Dominican Republic.

In Nairobi, colonial settlers introduced plantations and used African labor on their farms and homesteads and segregated residential areas by creating African reserves in the outskirts of the city and African, European and Asian neighborhoods in the city (van Zwanenberg, 1972). The African section, located in the eastern part of the city, was characterized by poor foundations and poor drainage conditions. This eastern part of the city has become the area where most of Nairobi’s low-income group reside (Tuts et al., 1989). Amis (1990, p. 86) reports the effects of these racially segregated residential areas continue to affect current population density and distribution in the city, “Nairobi has inherited an extremely unequal land distribution from colonial racial residential planning such that in 1972 there were...
eight inhabitants per acre in the ex-European zone, 32 in the Asian Zone, and 400 in the African zone.”

Before the 20th century, Santo Domingo was composed of the colonial area enclosed within its walls and a few surrounding neighborhoods. During the early part of the century, three squatter settlements, San Carlos, Ensanche La Fe and Galindo, developed in the northern part of the city. As the city expanded, the upper and middle-income groups segregated themselves and began settling on the western part of the city (Pons, 1994).

Other factors that have contributed to the housing shortage in both cities include poor management of some low-income housing projects. Classic examples of such failed schemes in Nairobi include the New Pumwani Urban Renewal Project and the Dandora Phase II Community Development Housing Project, which became too expensive for most and only a small number of the original residents could afford the new units. In addition, some of the beneficiaries sold the new units and moved out of the area to establish slum and squatter settlements in other parts of the city (McInnes, 1995). In Santo Domingo, between 1911 and 1920, special land laws were passed that introduced modern plantation agriculture, which replaced the communal land system. Foreign investors expelled many rural families who then migrated to Santo Domingo and other towns. During the 1950s, another wave of peasants was expelled, to accommodate more sugar plantations. In order to house the migrants in Santo Domingo, the government constructed two barrios obreros (workers’ neighborhoods) – Ensanche Espaiillat and Ensanche Luperón – in the northern part of the city. However, corrupt military officials and politicians benefited from most of the housing in Ensanche Luperón and only a small number of the low-income families managed to settle there. As a solution to their housing problem, most peasants settled on the edges of the Ozama River and this area became the first large-scale squatter settlement in the city. Two barrios marginados (marginal neighborhoods) – Guachupita and Gualey – developed in this northeastern part of the city. To accommodate migration and natural growth, barrios marginados developed in various parts of the city, especially in the 1960s, so that by 1977, they contained 74% of the city’s population. These settlements lacked running water, electricity and sewage disposal (Pons, 1994).

Having discussed some of the factors that contributed to the housing shortages in both cities, the paper will now analyze some top-down approaches employed in both Kenya and the Dominican Republic.

**Top-down approaches implemented to curb the housing crisis in Nairobi and Santo Domingo**

In Nairobi, after independence in 1963, Africans migrated to the city in large numbers, thus creating a housing crisis. According to Muwonge (1980), during colonial rule, the housing shortage was not as severe because the government controlled the migration of Africans but after 1963, Nairobi’s population rose sharply. Before independence, the population growth rate in the city between 1948 and 1962 was 6%, and this rose to 9.3% between 1962 and 1969. In an effort to ease the housing shortage, the government declared in the 1964–1970 Development Plan that low-income urban housing and slum clearance would be tackled by providing rental and home ownership schemes. The plan also reported that since the cost of a minimum two-roomed house was too expensive for most low-income earners, the government was going to introduce sites and services schemes. Towards the end of the 1960s, the Nairobi City Council formulated new strategies to deal with the housing crisis. The City Council declared it would support the sites and services programmes, lower the building code, and introduce squatter upgrading schemes. Both sites and services schemes and squatter upgrading programmes got a boost from the World Bank when it began funding housing projects in the early 1970s. Following the Bank’s lead, other national and international agencies also began to fund and support these projects (GOK, 1964; Muwonge, 1980; HRDU, 1977).

Although the UN encourages governments to consider a balanced approach to shelter upgrading and new shelter construction, this has not been the case in Nairobi. For example, the government introduced new and drastic measures to ease the housing shortage in urban areas by launching the Urban Renewal Programme in 1987. The programme was to redevelop low-income housing areas, build high rise flats and phase out both the sites and services schemes and the upgrading of squatter settlements. By the early 1990s, Nairobi and other urban areas were already experiencing the effects of these new policies, “In 1990, no units were completed under the ‘site and service scheme’ which in early eighties accounted for more than half of the total units completed by the [NHC]. The shift to Tenant Purchase, Mortgage and Rental schemes has contributed to the phasing out of ‘site and service schemes’” (GOK, 1991, p. 139).

Under the Urban Renewal Programme, Pumwani Majengo High Rise Flats Phase I was completed in 1989, and Kibera High Rise Flats Phase I was completed in 1991, providing a total of 1,266 housing units. The government also reported that the city would provide more housing units for rent such as the Kibera and Pumwani-Majengo projects (GOK, 1992, 1994). This was accomplished in 1994 when more housing units became available after the completion of the Kibera Phase II tenant purchase scheme. The construction of new housing units for both low-income and lower-middle income groups was completed in various parts of the city, including Uhuru Garden, Otiende, Langata Dam,
and Jonathan Ngeno Estate (GOK, 1995; 1996a; 2003).

In Santo Domingo, in an effort to curb the housing crisis, the government employed several policies during the 1970s that reduced the cost of units but hardly managed to keep up with the high demand for housing. According to Gómez et al. (1984), in 1972 and 1973, two Acts were introduced to stop the importation of timber and cement, and both Acts promoted the use of local materials for construction. An increase in investment in the construction sector during the 1970s also increased the use of local materials for construction, and in 1980 the government more than tripled the amount of investments made in construction as compared to 1970. The informal sector also played an important role in housing during the 1970s, by producing 85% of the units in the country with 51% of these in urban areas where most were occupied by new migrants.

To solve some of the housing problems in the Dominican Republic, the UNCHS (1986), under the International Year for Shelter for the Homeless (IYSH) committee, recommended that Instituto Nacional de la Vivienda (INVHI) create an umbrella body with organizations in the housing sector and other sectors engaged in housing. These organizations made up the Coordinating National Commission of the Dominican Republic of the IYSH. The Commission set up three sub-committees to carry out various duties including communication and information, the execution of events, and the selection of IYSH projects. In 1985, the Commission and sub-committees came up with a work programme, whose objectives included:

- developing a national housing policy to guide public, private and popular sectors;
- introducing policies to improve low-income settlements in urban areas;
- organizing an exposition on the housing crisis;
- offering workshops for people in the housing sector;
- encouraging the country to get engaged in global housing networks;
- following up and evaluating housing programmes set up to cater to housing needs in the country.

According to the UNCHS (1986), in order to curb the housing crisis, the government has in the past tried out a variety of solutions including social housing, various types of low-cost housing schemes, and sites and services. But none of these solutions has managed to solve the housing shortage. The problem of affordability in the Dominican Republic is serious and most of the poor cannot afford new housing with basic services unless the units are heavily subsidized. Also, sites and services projects turn out to be too costly and the UN suggests that the government should focus on squatter-upgrading projects instead.

Like other cities in LDCs, the housing shortages in Nairobi and Santo Domingo have been on going for several decades and most strategies that have been employed in the past have failed to curb the crisis. The main factors that have contributed to the housing shortage in both cities are similar to those encountered in other LDCs: namely, population growth, rural to urban migration, lack of funds, affordability, and poor governance. In the past, several studies conducted in both Kenya and the Dominican Republic offered recommendations on how both governments can manage to solve the housing problem. Towards the end of the 1990s, both governments came up with documents that laid out strategies that would be used to tackle the shelter problem. Some of the solutions presented by both governments include recommendations made in previous studies, as well as global housing policies advocated by the UN and the World Bank. In addition, recommendations made by both governments include implementing enabling policies that will facilitate the efforts of all actors in the shelter sector. In accordance to enabling policies advocated by the UN, both countries have laid out National Action Plans to help curb the housing crisis. The following section explores the National Action Plans advocated in both countries.

Enabling policies advocated by both governments in their National Action Plans

As discussed earlier, an enabling approach was launched to overcome problems encountered under the top-down approach and one of the policies that influenced housing programmes during the 1990s was the Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000 (GSS). During the formation of the GSS, the UNCHS recommended that all nations develop their own National Action Plans to help curb the housing shortage. Governments were urged to follow their own timetables that would adhere to a general framework that aimed at establishing national policies and strategies. Each country was to design new institutional arrangements between 1989 and 1991, and from 1991 to 1994 governments were to try and introduce new institutional arrangements, and strengthen existing national programmes. Between 1995 and 2000, governments were to start full-scale operation of national programmes and plan for progressive strengthening of institutions for activities beyond 2000 (UNCHS, 1991b). Kenya and the Dominican Republic have come up with National Action Plans that aim at providing shelter for all, especially the low-income. This section of the paper will review the National Action Plans in Kenya and the Dominican Republic, respectively.

Kenya's National Action Plan

The UNCHS (1991b) sponsored the Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000: Sub-Regional Seminars
to Support National Action to help governments plan for the future. During the seminars, Kenya presented its national action proposals for the future which states that the government will:

- support and provide funds when possible to institutions that are willing and able to increase housing in the city;
- encourage and support the private sector in providing housing for all by urging employers to provide housing for their employees, and by revising the infrastructure standards to help the private sector provide cheaper housing for the poor;
- support the informal sector and encourage it to continue providing acceptable housing;
- encourage the use of indigenous building materials, support research on cheap and sustainable materials, and at the same time protect natural resources;
- analyze the role of women and young people in the shelter sector.

Towards the end of the 1990s, the government came up with a variety of strategies intended to improve the provision of housing in Nairobi and other urban areas. Most of these strategies follow recommendations made by the World Bank and the UNCHS already discussed earlier: in its Economic Reforms for 1996–1998, the government (GOK, 1996b) says it will encourage access to low-cost housing through cooperative societies, while in the National Development Plan 1997–2001, the government (GOK, 1996c) states that it will follow the Plan of action presented at the 1996 UNCHS Habitat II Conference in Istanbul, Turkey. This Plan of action will:

- come up with a long term plan for upgrading all slum and squatter settlements;
- reconstruct run-down residential infrastructure;
- upgrade infrastructure in informal but permanent housing estates;
- speed up the issuing of title deeds;
- reduce land speculation through "ad-valorem tax on urban land";
- review zoning laws and land use regulations;
- establish a secondary market for mortgage and use the pension fund to lend money to employers for construction of low cost housing for their employees;
- reorganize the public sector so NGOs and CBOs can fill in institutional gaps.

The Dominican Republic’s National Action Plan

In the Programa de Gobierno 1996–2000 and 2000–2004, the government (PLD, 1996; El Partido, 2000) lists some of the strategies it plans to use to curb the housing crisis. The government states that it will try to lower the national housing deficit in rural and urban areas, both quantitatively and qualitatively and prioritize the needs in rural areas and in low-income urban areas. The government plans to provide funds to the private sector to encourage it to meet the demands of housing for the low and middle-income groups annually. The government will set aside funding for the private sector and CBOs with most of the money intended to help the very poor. It will continue helping poor families by estimating their limitations, and resettling those who are willing to move to special sites. Through government and community help, it is hoped that these families will become less dependent on the public sector. The government will also have to complete construction projects that are underway with the original order of priority. The government plans to work with the private sector to develop a system of savings and loans that will target home owners, especially those interested in improving their structures but who do not have collateral to borrow from formal financial institutions. The government will encourage the use of low-cost materials for construction and set up programmes for loaning out building materials to the low-income. The government will also negotiate with the private sector to provide the necessary building materials at lower prices. It will work with research centers such as universities in an effort to introduce new construction technologies and to promote the use of local materials to build housing.

On improving relations and cooperation with other actors in the shelter sector, the government will: (1) support NGOs that promote the use of non-conventional building materials; (2) support institutions in the shelter sector that aim at lowering the cost of constructing housing; (3) lower the cost of construction by encouraging CBOs to provide mano de obra (man power); (4) create the necessary conditions to encourage professionals and enterprises in the construction industry to freely express their proposals on solutions to the housing problem; and (5) assist financial institutions in establishing financial estimates that can be used to enable them to construct housing that meets social needs (PLD, 1996; El Partido, 2000).

Recognizing the need to train those employed in the housing sector, both formal and informal, the government plans to work with Instituto Nacional de Formación Técnico Profesional so it can carry out applicable training programmes for all workers. The government also hopes to promote coordination among universities and other institutions on training programmes for workers and technicians in construction to increase the number of skilled workers in the construction industry. To cut down on the cost of constructing low-income housing, the government plans to train slum dwellers on how to use basic construction techniques when they participate in programmes that aim at improving housing and services. The government also plans to set up applicable programmes for housing solutions that are non-conventional in a manner that will meet the needs of the majority with the least problems. The
government hopes to encourage the participation of all actors in the housing sector by: (1) encouraging community participation in urban programmes; (2) encouraging involvement of employers and employees in providing solutions to the housing crisis; and (3) by revising the requirements for joining the Ahorro habitacional (a housing savings and loans organization), to enable the majority to benefit from its services (PLD, 1996; El Partido, 2000).

On improving the infrastructure and providing basic services, the government will start working with municipalities, NGOs and CBOs to enable them to set up infrastructure on government and municipal land. The government plans to support the low-income by: (1) facilitating the process of providing title deeds; (2) revising policies on slums so they can be upgraded before they deteriorate; and (3) by revising construction laws to ensure that they result in low-cost units. At the national level, the government plans to apply housing programmes that meet the needs of all parts of the country and that conform to development plans. Also, to promote national development, the government will sponsor the production of housing near areas of work for professionals and technicians in public institutions including teachers, doctors and agriculturists, to encourage them to settle in these areas so that they can participate in local development projects (PLD, 1996).

**Drawing comparisons: enabling strategies advocated by both governments**

Both the Governments of Kenya and the Dominican Republic have laid down almost similar strategies in their National Action Plans in an effort to solve the housing crisis. In particular, both governments plan to promote:

- the participation of all actors in the shelter sector, especially NGOs and CBOs;
- the involvement of employers in providing solutions to the housing crisis;
- the use of non-conventional building materials;
- research on the use of low cost and sustainable building materials;
- the issuing of title deeds;
- the upgrading of low-income housing.

The above policies, if employed effectively, will enable both countries to overcome some of the obstacles encountered under the top-down approach and at the same time facilitate the efforts of all actors in the shelter sector. For example, facilitating the issuing of title deeds and upgrading low-income housing instead of demolishing these settlements will avoid the displacement of the target group. The use of non-conventional building materials and facilitating the participation of NGOs and CBOs in construction, will lower costs and eliminate the problem of affordability. Cost-recovery will be realized through the use of non-conventional and low-cost building materials, as well as low-cost labor from CBOs. By resolving the issues of displacement, affordability, and cost-recovery, replicability will be possible.

Elsewhere, I have analyzed the extent to which both cities have implemented enabling policies in some of their development projects (Kigochie, 2001; Muraya, 2002, 2006). For example, in Nairobi, the Mathare 4A Development Programme is upgrading housing and infrastructure and at the same time providing employment for residents. In Santo Domingo, development projects in La Piña and Lebrón are upgrading housing and infrastructure and also creating jobs for residents. The housing projects in Santo Domingo also loan out building materials and train the target group on how to use basic construction techniques as advocated in the country's National Action Plan. The development projects in both cities also use local low-cost building materials and rely on CBOs to provide low-cost labor. In both cities, the governments promote research on the use of low cost and sustainable building materials, and the development projects involve various actors in the shelter sector. By employing various enabling strategies, the development projects in both cities have managed to overcome some problems encountered under the top-down approach, especially displacement of the target group and cost-recovery.

**Conclusions**

This paper has analyzed why the top-down approach failed to provide affordable housing for the poor in Nairobi and Santo Domingo. The current global housing policy promotes enabling strategies in an effort to overcome obstacles encountered under the top-down approach: namely displacement, affordability, cost-recovery, and replicability. Both the Governments of Kenya and the Dominican Republic have adopted enabling policies which are highlighted in their National Action Plans. Some of these policies include: facilitating the efforts of all actors in providing shelter; the use of non-conventional building materials; and the upgrading of low-income housing. Both countries have various ongoing development projects that employ these enabling strategies. These projects provide low-cost shelter, create jobs and improve conditions in the settlements, and at the same time eliminate some of the obstacles encountered under the top-down approach in particular displacement and cost-recovery.

Given the global adoption of the enabling approach and the persistent problem of providing adequate shelter for all in LDCs, there is need for further research to analyze the effectiveness of the enabling approach in curbing the shelter crisis. Studies can analyze the enabling approach for strengths and imperfections. For example, the enabling approach urges governments to permit other actors in the shelter sector to take over the role of providing housing. Studies can explore whether governments in LDCs
are heeding this call and reveal which actors are most prominent in the provision of housing. Research can also examine whether problems encountered under the top-down approach are recurring under the enabling approach and how LDCs are trying to overcome these problems.

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