Land, financial obstacles identified as major hurdles in housing sector

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A two-day international workshop on Housing and Informal Settlement Upgrading, which opened in Accra on Wednesday, has identified land topography, financial, and land inaccessibility as major challenges in the housing industry in Africa.

Approximately 400,000 informal settlements and backyard shack households still need to be properly housed to curb overcrowding in urban centres in Africa.

Ms Hanna Louisa Bisiw, Deputy Minister of Water Resources, Works and Housing, said the main developmental constraint in Africa were the high population and urban growth rates, environmental degradation and natural disasters, all of which directly or indirectly affect housing conditions.

An increase in population demands and other infrastructural facilities such transport, hospital, schools and factories had impacted on these challenges.

More than 70 per cent of Africa's urban population live in slums and more than 50 per cent of the urban population in South Asia and 40 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa, lack access to sanitation services.

Ms Bisiw said Ghana faced an acute housing backlog of 1.7 million units with the most vulnerable being the urban and rural poor.

She said 43 per cent of urban dwellers in Ghana live in slums with 1.3 million living in Accra with the city's population spending more money to access water in their communities.

"Close to 90 per cent of slum residents do not meet the international standard for access to an improved sanitation facility and there is the issue of the use of sub-standard materials in housing construction," she said.

Ms Bisiw said Ghana had outlined several policies and strategies and that include the use of at least 60 per cent of local building materials in the construction industry as well as providing affordable housing for targeted group within the economy.

Ms Bisiw said majority of slum dwellers in African cities were between the ages of 15 and 24 and cited Nairobi Kenya for instance where there was one toilet for every 500 people living in slums.

She said according to statistics from the UN-Habitat, global demand for housing would grow at an alarming rate in the year 2030.

“According to the research, an additional three billion people, approximately 40 percent of the world’s population, would require access to housing in that particular year. This means that, there would be demand for 96,150 new affordable housing units every day.

Presenting a paper on the “Contextual Analysis on the Situation of Housing in Slum Areas in Africa, Mr Mark Byerley, Manager of the Housing Policy Sector, eThekwini Municipality, South Africa, said land was very difficult to access thereby urban dwellers tend to build haphazardly without factoring in location and steep slopes.

He said in order to arrest the problem there was the need for relocation, interim services and other special interventions.

About 50 participants from eight African countries including Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Uganda, Namibia, Tanzania, and South Africa are attending the workshop.

The workshop is sponsored by CIFAL Durban, an affiliate of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) established for training of local authorities in Anglophone Africa.

It offers series of regional, national and international training events on sustainable solution to the challenges faced by local authorities.

It is an innovative partnership between the UN, local authorities, business and training institutions for sustainable development.

CIFAL training sessions address policy development, social and technical issues related to sustainable development. It also encourages an inter-disciplinary and collaborative approach by participants to forge strategic alliances, helping them find solutions.

Source: GNA