



Research Paper

Effective Strategies for Improving Multi-Tenanted Low-Income Residential Property Management in Port Harcourt, Nigeria

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Abstract

The administration of multi-tenanted low-income residential dwellings presents numerous challenges. This study looks at the issues that arise while managing multi-tenanted low-income residential properties in Port Harcourt and offers suggestions on how to fix them. Tenants of Oroma Homes and Golden Homes, Rumuigbo new layout off NTA road, as well as practicing estate surveyors and valuers in Port Harcourt were given questionnaires to fill out in order to get their opinions on how well low-income multi-tenanted buildings are managed. According to the findings, tenants were not satisfied with management strategies adopted by managing estate surveyors and valuers. Managing estate surveyors and valuers' management techniques are unpopular with tenants. In order to improve management, the paper suggests, among other things, careful tenant selection, out-of-court settlement of any conflicts as a last resort, creation of innovations that can encourage tenants to pay rent as at when due and periodic visits to discuss matters of mutual interest with tenants.

Keywords: Low-Income Residential Properties, Multi-tenanted, Property Management, Effective Strategies.

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I. Introduction

Real property management involves more than just collection of rent. The management of existing structures built on land with the goal of achieving the optimum return - which need not always be financial but may be measured in terms of social benefit, status e.t.c.- is known as property management (Thorncroft, 1976). Additionally, it refers to the general management of landed property on behalf of the owners, who the property manager typically refers to as the clients. Residential property management includes more than just collecting rent and keeping up with repairs and maintenance but entails also other aspects of good management. The importance of managing residential properties has become so complex that it now needs the knowledge and services of qualified property managers to perform the task.

A property manager participates in managerial decision-making processes and problem-solving. He also performs several activities and tasks involving planning, organizing, directing and controlling with respect to the portfolio of real estate assets being managed on behalf of his clients (Thorncroft, 1976). This is significant because real estate requires management, which is one of the characteristics that sets it apart from other investment options. There is a need for a skilled manager who is able to deal effectively and efficiently with management issues emerging from the buildings put into multiple occupations in our cities due to the increasing rate of technological development or advances. Property management over the years in Nigeria has been faced with some many challenges ranging from maintenance issues, handling tenants and their complaints, payment of rent issues and profitability. Property management involves using specialist knowledge to look after the investment, sometimes of an individual, household or corporate body in buildings with the aim of securing maximum return (Oladokun and Ojo, 2012). According to Scarrett (1995) its purpose is to maximize the owner's investment. The success of such a capital-intensive investment can be attributed to its management, according to Oladokun and Ojo (2012), who claim that investment in multi-tenanted low-income residential

property is frequently expressed as the biggest investment of a household due to the capital requirement for its acquisition. People frequently assume that property management is a straightforward process of caring for buildings, including cleaning the common spaces, assigning security guards to watch the doors, and maintaining the building's common areas. of construction, facilities, and services (Cheng, 1998). However, it has been described by (Sangosanya, 1986) as a specialized job that entails the development of knowledge and specialized abilities in a certain field of activity. The focus of good property management should be on the users rather than the building (Li, 1997).

The implication of this is that there is a need to acquire basic knowledge and training that will enhance effective performance. A property manager should also be well-versed in economics, accounting, finance, architecture, and building services. Furthermore, having access to an experienced attorney, being able to communicate effectively, being able to plan ahead and assign tasks efficiently, and having a solid understanding of landlord-tenant legislation are all important. of building, facilities, and services (Oladokun and Ojo, 2012). Property management also involves tracking information on tenant profiles, occupancy, operating and capital expenses, and revenues (Kaganova& Nayyar-Stone, 2000). The key to effective property management depends on treating tenants as valuable clients. Knowing the preferences of customer, enables practicing firms to provide customized products and superior services (Kennedy & Schneider, 2000).

When a building is used for multiple occupations, certain problems arise which may directly or indirectly have an impact on the building's structure, the satisfaction of its occupants, and the surrounding natural environment. The management of multi-tenanted low-income residential properties presents numerous challenges. There is need to meet up with the essence of the investment, preservation of the building and tenant's satisfaction.

To fully capture the essence of customer satisfaction, this essay explores issues with managing multi-tenanted low-income residential buildings and presents study findings as well as recommendations for better management practices.

This study will provide a thorough understanding of the issues with property management and suggest solutions. It will aid in formulating suggestions for remedies to the issues with property management in the study region and Nigeria generally, as well as in a multi-tenanted low-income residential building. The study will act as a resource for other scholars who will pursue this subject as well as a guide for efficient property management.

II. A Review of Related Literature

2.1 Concept of Property Management

Narains (2007) defined property management as “the range of functions concerned with looking after buildings, and that includes a collection of rents, payments of outgoings, maintenance, including repair, provision of services, insurance and negotiation with tenants or prospective tenants”. Property management can be defined as the process of keeping a property in a good state of health, devoid of decay to enhance the value of the property and yielding best returns to the investment (Oyedele, 2013). Property management is an act of intermediation between owners and occupieRs on issues affecting the parties arising from ownership and occupation of buildings (Timothy &Olatoye 2012). It is a conscious process of guiding and tailoring an investment in land into profitable venture. Its main concern is the optimization of the owner's investment (Oladokun and Ojo, (2012) citing Scarrett, 1995).

2.2 Functions of a Property Manager

The property manager is focused on interpreting and putting into practice the owner's policy and interests. He sets goals and offers guidance on possible routes of action. The property manager is responsible for ensuring that the interests of his client are safeguarded financially and legally. The responsibility of the property manager covers the management of the real estate investment (Hemuka, 1990).

According to Ibrahim (2014), Olayonwa (2000) and Colorado State (2005); the functions of the property manager includes:

- i. Determination of rental values, the collection of rents, keeping safe of the rents collected and rendering of accounts to his client.
- ii. Making sure that records and registers that will provide necessary data on the property are kept.
- iii. Ensuring good rent-paying tenants through careful selection process, renewals, termination of tenancies, negotiating and agreeing to termsanddeterminingthattenancies/lease/sub-leasesarewelldocumentedandconsentsgivenwherenecessary.
- iv. Making sure covenants and other agreements are implemented.
- v. Dealing with the tenement, water rates and remitting same to appropriate authorities.
- vi. Making an adequate insurance policy plan for the property.

- vii. Making sure that services are provided to the satisfaction of owners and tenants.
- viii. Carrying out periodic inspection, maintenance, and repairs.
- ix. Selection and supervision of staff engaged directly and exclusively for a given property.

2.3 Problems of Management of Multi-Tenanted Low-Income Residential Properties

The practice of property management of low income multi tenanted properties is prone to a lot of problems which are capable of preventing or at best reducing the chances of realizing anticipated investment objectives. For example, Li (1997) examined the opportunities and problems in property management in China and highlighted staffing and training as major problems that could threaten effective property management practice. Enhassi, (2001) predict that a structural defect could arise as a result of relapse in a part of a building due to use over time or an error in design or construction. Odumodu, (2004) identified Security problems as forms of challenges that must arise during the course of managing multi-tenanted buildings. Llewellyn (2002) also pointed out that managing a high-rise building involves special security gadgets considering the heavy human traffic at all times. Zick (1998) outlined that one of the major functions of a Property Manager is collection of rents as at when due. He noted that multi-tenanted buildings come with problems of rent collection.

According to Onyekwelu (2009), there are several other problems encountered in the management of multi-tenanted low-income residential properties and they include:

- i. **Financial Aspect.** The rental income from the various units of accommodation in a multi-tenanted low-income residential property comes at different times, hence it is not easy to accumulate funds to effect needed repairs because most often no service charge account is maintained. Where the property is the only source of income for the landlord, the property manager will constantly be under pressure from the landlord to remit to him whatever amount is realized to solve his personal problems while all outstanding maintenance request are shifted to a later date.
- ii. **Improper Usage.** Onyekwelu (2009), note that improper use of property lead's to deterioration which if not promptly checked could prove fatal for the building. He said due to acute problem of housing especially in urban cities, an accommodation unit meant for three (3) persons often end up accommodating ten (10) persons. The first noticeable effect is usually a run on the amenities apart from the long-term effect on the building members and structure. The result is constant breakdown and before long it will become uneconomical to continue to repair it.
- iii. **Lack of Infrastructural facilities.** There has been general inadequacy of infrastructural facilities in multi-tenanted properties. The erratic and fluctuation in the supply of electricity and acute shortage of portable water have in most cases affected residential property management. It causes a drastic increase in the maintenance cost; and the increased costs of maintenance reduce income accruing to the property. Onyekwelu (2009), opined that all these problems make the responsibility of managing low income residential properties time consuming, labourious and less rewarding.
- iv. **Service Charge account.** In most multi-tenanted low-income properties, no service charge account is maintained. Essential services such as lightening and cleaning of common parts, clearing the drains and gutters, etc pose serious problems for the property manager. Service charge account should be maintained for such properties. This will ensure that the property is well taken care of, as the money in the service charge account would be used to maintain the facilities and other services.
- v. **Wanton Destruction of Property.** When some tenants vacate their premises, it is often peculiar to find out that the property is deliberately left in shambles and in an un-lettable condition. Some tenants go as far as removing all fixtures and fittings which they met in the premises. Onyekwelu (2009), said such acts of destruction regrettably make the responsibility of the property manager burdensome. Legal actions taken against such irresponsible tenants by the property manager normally takes time to remedy the situation.
- vi. **Nuisance to other tenants.** From time to time, multi-tenanted properties encounter tenants whose behaviour constitutes nuisance to other tenants. Examples are careless attitudes, quarrelsome, noise making, dirty habits and wrong parking of cars thereby causing obstructions to other tenants.
- vii. **Lack of co-operation from the tenant.** Ignorantly, some tenants see property managers functions as only to protect and enforce landlords' wishes on them without any consideration for the rule of law or recourse to the covenants between the parties. Importantly they see property managers as instrument by the landlord to increase rent or eject tenants. This view is however very parochial. Thus, they tend to frustrate the efforts by the property manager to have reasonable co-operation from them at initial stage of take over

2.4 Solution to the Management of Multi Tenanted Low Income Residential Properties

In order for a property manager to have peace of mind in the management of low income multi-tenanted residential properties, the basic management check-list he or she should put in place as document by Olufemi (2013) are:

- i. Disclosure check: Conduct background information checks on all aspiring tenants. Managers should not be sentimental in choosing tenants. He should choose from a multitude and do not rush into choosing

the first tenant that comes your way. If you cannot get more than one tenant for the property, it shows the advertisement strategy is wrong or that the property letting terms and conditions are not attractive. Advertising has a central role to play in developing brand image whether at the corporate, retail or product level (Meenaghan, 1995).

ii. Lease, contract or rental agreement should be strong and clear. It should state and establish what constitutes breaches and the penalties that will be meted out in case of breaches by the tenants. Allow premium for short-term lease as long-term lease is better. Saari and Takki (2008) said that "when tenants stay longer in the same facility there is less empty space and less need for alterations by new tenants".

iii. Prepare a comprehensive inventory list: Inventory is the total amount of goods and/or materials contained in a house, store or factory at any given time. It is expeditious to prepare an elaborate and up-to-date inventory, listing all the materials including fixtures and fittings in the house. No material, no matter how small, should be left out of the list. Conduct a review of the inventory with the tenant or his or her able representatives and ask him or her to sign copies. Tenants should be able to restore a property as they met it unless they have improved it with the consent of the property owner or his or her agents.

iv. Motivate tenants to pay: Introduce award, rewards and letter of commendations. In the past, property managers have no reason to be innovative as the routine is easy and uniform. Nowadays, a good manager must invent means of making tenants to pay. Newsletter can be introduced where issues pertaining to rent collection and services rendered in the reporting period are treated. Property managers should pay periodical visits to their tenants to discuss issues of mutual interest.

v. Be aggressive in writing demand notices or letters of reminder of payment. Follow up is crucial in rent collection. There should be schedule as to timeline in writing "Letter of Reminder" after "Demand Notice". Most tenants fail to pay because they are not reminded of their duty to do so. It is the duty of the property owner or his/her agents to go for the rent and 'bombard' the tenant with letters of reminder to pay rent. Letter of reminder should be followed by letter of intent to reposes property and quoting the clause in the lease agreement which has been breached. Property managers should have good filing system to save records. The use of computer may be considered as it is faster to retrieve information on electronic files. If the tenant is comfortable getting his or her letters at home, change to his or her office where he or she will not want people to know he/she has rent backlog.

vi. Invest time and money to make sure the property is up-to-date, well maintained and attractive. Check the aesthetic, facilities, services, security and accessibility. These will make sure that other tenants are interested in the property. Checking the above will also make the rent to be competitive. Charge reasonable rent and where applicable service charge. Wilson and Okunev (1999) said that "understanding cyclical activity is an important component of efficient portfolio management". Property managers should be conversant with the market trend of rental property market and carry out surveys regularly to determine suitable rents for their property.

vii. Getting professional advice from lawyers, estate agents and tradesmen may be helpful and serve as value for money. Professionals are experienced in their fields and can accurately predict situations as they are guided by available data. It is also profitable to network with other friends, neighbours and family members who have investment properties to share from their experiences.

viii. Consider eviction where there is no other choice: Nowadays, lease agreements contain faster and cheaper means of settling disagreement between landlord and tenant like negotiation, arbitration or mediation. Yiu et al (2006) posited that "reducing exclusion and internal conflict resolution costs is one of the major reasons why property management exists". After all dispute resolution means have been exploited, it will be best to enter eviction process as soon as possible. This will be contained in the lease agreement. The process is usually through writing of "Quit Notice" or "Letter of Intent to Proceed Eviction in the Court". The letters will contain expiry date as provided by the law of the area, after which the tenant will be taken to court. Where the tenant vacates the property before the expiry date of the notice to quit property, the onus lies on the property owner or his agent to adopt debt collection means to collect the outstanding rent. There are professional debt collectors in this regard who will go after the debt for a fee.

III. Research Methodology

The study uses questionnaire survey for the collection of primary data. The source of the secondary data was journal articles, textbooks and the internet materials. The population used for the study is tenants of Oroma homes and Golden homes, Rumuigbo new layout off NTA road; and Estate Surveyors and Valuers in Rivers State. Oroma homes and Golden homes was selected for investigation as it reflected the characteristics of multi-tenanted low-income residential properties.

The sample frame includes all tenants of Oroma homes and Golden homes comprising 23 tenants in Oroma homes and 18 tenants in Golden homes, and 60 estate surveyors and valuers in Port Harcourt. Thirty (30) questionnaires which represents 73% out of the 41 questionnaires administered to tenants; and forty-two (42)

questionnaires which represents 70% out of the 60 questionnaires administered to estate surveyors and valuers were found useful for analysis.

The questionnaire was basically used to elicit respondents' perceptions on their assessment of property management of low income multi tenanted properties by professional estate managers in Port Harcourt. charts and the simple percentages were used to analyse respondents' responses.

IV. Data Presentation and Analysis

The data collected from field survey were presented and analyzed in this chapter based on the research questions and hypothesis that guided the study. Only the questions relevant to the research questions were presented and analyzed.

4.1 Personal Data of Respondents

Personal characteristics of respondents' samples used for this study were presented and analyzed in table 1.0 below.

Table 1.0: Sex Distribution of the Respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Tenants:		
Male	27	90
Female	3	10
Total	30	100
Estate Surveyors and Valuers:		
Male	31	73.8
Female	11	26.2
Total	42	100

Source: Researchers' Field Survey, 2022

Table 1.0 above shows that out of 30 respondent's tenants, 27 representing 90% were males, while 3 representing 10% were females. This shows that the majority of the respondent's tenants were males. On the sex distribution of Estate Surveyors and valuers, results indicate that out of 40 respondents, 31 representing 73.80% of the respondents were males while 11 representing 26.20% were females. This further confirmed the dominance of male practicing estate surveyors and valuers.

Table 2.0: Qualification of Respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Tenants:		
National Diploma	3	10.0
HND/BSc	19	63.3
MSc	8	26.7
Total	30	
Estate Surveyors and Valuers:		
National Diploma	2	04.8
HND/BSc	35	83.3
MSc	5	11.9
Total	42	100

Source: Researchers' Field Survey, 2022

Table 2.0 indicates that out of 30 respondents' tenants, 3 persons representing 10% have a National Diploma, 19 persons representing 63.3% had BSc, only 8 persons representing 26.7 % of the respondents have MSc. While out of 42 respondents' estate surveyors and valuers, 2 persons representing 04.8% have a National Diploma, 35 persons representing 83.3% had BSc, while 5 persons representing 11.9 % of the respondents have MSc. This shows that most of the respondents are literate enough and could therefore understand and answer the questions in the questionnaires.

4.3 Difficulties Encountered in the Management of a Multi-Tenanted Low-Income Residential Properties

Responses to this effect are presented and analysed in Table 3.0 below:

Table 3.0: Difficulties Encountered in Management of Multi-Tenanted Property

S/No.	Difficulties Encountered in Management of Multi-Tenanted Property	Yes		No	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1.	Cumulative maintenance problem	32	76.19	10	23.81
2.	Protracted legal between tenants and management	15	35.71	27	64.29
3.	Eviction conflicts due to effort to recover vacant possession.	29	69.05	13	30.95
4.	Subletting accommodation by tenants	25	59.52	17	40.48

	Electricity and plumbing needs	38	90.48	4	09.52
6.	Low management fee	35	83.33	7	16.67
7.	Irregular payment of service charges	30	71.43	12	28.57
8.	Misuse of premises	36	85.71	6	14.29
9.	Default in rent payment	34	80.95	8	19.05
10.	Improper tenant selection	33	78.57	9	21.43

Source: Researchers' Field Survey, 2022

The results in table 3.0 above shows that the respondents all agree to the nine out of the ten listed items are the difficulties encountered by estate surveyors in the management of multi tenanted property in the study area. They are Cumulative maintenance problem with 32(76.19%) said 'YES' and 10(23.81%) said 'NO'. Eviction conflicts due to effort to recover vacant possession 29(69.05%)said YES and 13(30.95%) said NO Subletting accommodation by tenants 25(59.52%)said YES and 17(40.48%) said NO. Electricity and plumbing needs 38(90.48%)said yes and 04(09.52) said no, Low management fee 35(83.33%)said yes and 07(16.67%) said no, Irregular payment of service charges 30(71.43%)said yes and 12(28.57) said no, Misuse of premises 36(85.71%)said yes and 06(14.29%) said no, Default in rent payment 34(80.95%)said yes and 08(19.05%) said no, Improper tenant selection 33(78.57%)said yes and 09(1.43%) said no. However, the respondents rejected Protracted legal between tenants and management as one of the difficulties encountered by estate surveyors in the management of multi tenanted property in the study area when 15(35.71%) said yes and 27(64.29) said no.

4.4 Tenant’s Satisfaction with the Management of Multi-Tenanted Low-Income Residential Properties in Port Harcourt.

Tenants were required to give their responses on their level of satisfaction with the management strategy employed by managing surveyors in the building occupied by them. Responses were measured using always satisfied, often satisfied, average, rarely satisfied, never satisfied. Responses to the question regarding the satisfaction of tenants with the management strategy for multi-tenanted properties challenges in Port Harcourt are presented and analysed with the aid of charts as shown in table and Figures 4.0 below:

Table 4.0 Tenant’s satisfaction with the management of multi-tenanted

Option	Tenants		Researchers' Survey, 2022
	Frequency	Percentage	
Always Satisfied	0	0%	Table 4.0 option that describes satisfaction
Often Satisfied	2	7%	
Average	4	13%	
Rarely Satisfied	10	33%	
Never Satisfied	14	47%	
Total	30	100%	

with the management of low income multi tenanted properties by estate firms in Port Harcourt. The results in table shows that 7% (2) of the respondents tenants are often satisfied with the management of low income multi tenanted properties by estate firms, 13%(4) of them are averagely satisfied with the management of low income multi tenanted properties by estate firms, 33%(10) are rarely satisfied with the management of low income multi tenanted properties by estate firms, while 47%(14) of them are never satisfied with the management of low income multi tenanted properties by estate firms. The combined frequency showed that 80% of the tenant are rarely and never satisfied with the management of low income multi tenanted properties by estate firms. Thus, it can be deduced that majority of the tenants are not satisfied with the management of low income multi tenanted properties by estate firms in Port Harcourt, hence the need for an effective management strategy to improve the management of low-income residential multi-tenanted properties.

4.5 Suggested Strategy to Improve the Management of a Multi-Tenanted Low-Income Residential Properties

In furtherance of the search for more an effective strategy that can improve the management of a multi-tenanted property, respondents were required to state their opinion on whether strategies like proper tenant selection to avoid rent default, resolving disputes out of court settlement as an option for first resort, avoidance of unwanted legal battle, enhancing property value to meet reasonable increase in rent, acquisition of sufficient capacity and client relationship for better practice could improve management of multi-tenanted property. Responses of the respondents are shown in table 5.0 below:

Table 5.0: Suggested Strategies for Improve Management of Multi-Tenanted Low-Income Residential Properties

S/No.	Suggested strategies for improving management of multi-tenanted property	Yes		No	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1.	Proper tenant selection to avoid rent default	37	88.10	5	11.90
2.	Resolving disputes out of court settlement as an option for first resort	34	80.95	8	19.05
3.	Invent innovations that can motivate tenants to pay rent	30	71.43	12	28.57
4.	Carry out inventory review with the tenant	40	95.24	02	04.76
5.	Check the aesthetic, facilities, services, security and accessibility by investing time and money to make sure the property is up-to-date, well maintained and attractive.	37	88.10	5	11.90
6.	Charge reasonable rent and where applicable service charge.	36	85.71	6	14.29
7.	Periodic visits by property managers to their tenants to discuss issues of mutual interest.	32	76.19	10	23.81
8.	Network with other friends, neighbours and family members who have investment properties to share from their experiences	39	92.86	03	07.14

Source: Researchers' Field Survey, 2022.

Table 5.0 above shows the suggestion of strategies that can improve management of multi-tenanted property. The respondents all agree that suggested strategies are adequate enough to improve the management of multi-tenanted property. The suggestions are Proper tenant selection to avoid rent default 37(88.10%); Resolving disputes out of court settlement as an option for first resort 34(80.95%); invent innovations that can motivate tenants to pay rent 30(71.43%); carry out inventory review with the tenant 40(95.24%); check the aesthetic, facilities, services, security and accessibility by investing time and money to make sure the property is up-to-date, well maintained and attractive 37(88.10%); charge reasonable rent and where applicable service charge 36(85.71%); periodic visits by property managers to their tenants to discuss issues of mutual interest 32(76.19%); network with other friends, neighbours and family members who have investment properties to share from their experiences 39(92.86%).

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study having examined the problems encountered in the management of multi-tenanted low-income residential properties found that cumulative maintenance problem, Eviction conflicts due to effort to recover vacant possession, subletting accommodation by tenants, Electricity and plumbing needs, low management fee, Irregular payment of service charges, Misuse of premises, Default in rent payment, Improper tenant selection are the basic problems of managing multi-tenanted low-income residential properties. The research also reveals that tenants as well as estate surveyors and valuers were rarely and sometimes never satisfied with the current strategies adopted in the management of multi-tenanted low-income residential properties in Port Harcourt

In view of the findings, the following recommendations are made to ease the management of multi-tenanted low-income residential properties.

- i. Landlords must make sure that high-quality building materials should be used so that it can withstand the soil type and climate
- ii. Qualified professionals should be hired and the artisans should be strictly supervised. in the construction of buildings.
- iii. There should be proper tenant selection to avoid rent default
- iv. Explore and use out-of-court settlement as alternative to settle any disputes
- v. Create innovations that can motivate tenants to pay rent
- vi. Organize periodic visits to discuss issues of mutual interest
- vii. Establish network with friends, neighbours and professionals who own investment properties and are willing to share their experiences
- viii. Develop client relationship and enough capacity for improved practice.

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