Environmental Problems at Government Housing Schemes: The Case of Five-Miles, Bartica

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DOI: 10.52377/BKKW9620

The UN-Habitat recognises housing as a basic human need, and it is a central tenet articulated under Sustainable Development Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities. In Guyana, this need is principally met by the Housing Act of 1996, which mandates the Central Housing and Planning Authority to establish housing schemes countrywide. Housing scheme establishment can be challenged by the physiographic conditions of hinterland regions. In 2010, the Authority proposed housing development at the periphery of Bartica, Cuyuni-Mazaruni (Region VII), which is earmarked as the nation's model green town. After site analysis signaled unsuitable environmental conditions for housing at an initially proposed location, the housing scheme was developed at the Five-Miles Potaro area. However, allocated lots were still affected by environmental problems. To understand the issue, this research examined the established procedures for housing development in Guyana and the environmental issues experienced at Five-Miles Housing Scheme. Data was collected through review of legislative documents, site visits, and interviews. A root cause analysis showed that the contributing factors to these environmental problems appeared to be inherent to the planning and implementation stages of housing scheme development. At Five-Miles Housing Scheme, rapid-onset erosion prompted the relocation of middle-income residents who were allocated lands at the scheme's easterly sections. Several contributing factors were identified, which were grouped as surface factors (lack of drainage infrastructure and a fragmented development process) and root factors (absence of: an environmental mandate within housing legislation, a land use policy, and an environmental impact assessment). These findings indicate that the legal instruments and policies that guide housing development can benefit from consonance with the Environmental Protection Act, which can help to realise environmental and economic goals in the provisioning of sustainable housing across Guyana.

Keywords: Housing scheme development; environmental problems