

# Focus on needs, not just volume — World Bank

KUALA LUMPUR: The governments' focus on delivering volume in promoting home ownership without properly taking into account the needs of its people may impact overall affordability, according to the World Bank Group.

"My general concern is the number, or volume, that governments are trying to reach," said World Bank senior housing specialist Dao Harrison during a panel discussion at the "Constructing and Financing Affordable Housing across Asia Conference" here yesterday.

"From what I see in the markets — where the governments are going through with [plans to reach] 100,000 units per year this year — the tendency is to drive for that [target], and [it is] that drive to get to that volume that translates to poorly-located housing and quality of construction, and driving up affordability because of transportation costs," said Harrison.

She added that while there are other externalities in the function, it is ultimately more important to zoom into micro markets in order

to identify more accurately where the needs of the people lie.

"Getting that right is not an easy thing to do, and that really requires a bit of discipline. And I think that's always hard because we want to deliver [the numbers]," she added.

International Finance Corp principal operations officer of housing finance William Britt Gwinner, meanwhile, observed that in a foreign market, huge mistakes have been made in investing substantially in housing located far from amenities and jobs.

"Urban planning dimension is easy to ignore, but it is important to include earlier on in these kinds of discussions," he stressed.

The two-day conference, which was jointly organised by Cagamas and the World Bank Group, brought key figures from the public and private sectors, finance and financial technology leaders, innovators, as well as green and disaster resilient housing experts to discuss solutions and challenges in building and financing affordable housing.