

POVERTY AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION IN THE LAGOS METROPOLIS

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the environmental problems confronting the Lagos Metropolis. The problems are both natural and man-made and can be grouped into physical, sociological and management. After describing the phenomena of poverty and environmental degradation, the paper examines the nature of prevalent environmental problems in the Lagos Metropolis and the causes and consequences. It was discovered that the urban poor play a major part in causing these problems. They are also particularly vulnerable to the consequences of problems. Lagos metropolis is quite far from achieving any of the targets of the Millennium Development Goals. The paper concludes by advancing good urban governance as a strategy for achieving a sustainable Lagos Mega-city and meeting the targets for the MDG's.

Key Words: Urban Poverty, Environmental Degradation, Good Urban Governance

INTRODUCTION

The critical problems facing cities of the developing world include deteriorating living conditions, increasing rates of death and diseases caused by pollution and poor sanitation. The environmental and social consequences of urbanization are quite visible. Conversion of environmentally fragile areas to shantytowns by indigent migrants highlights the inextricable relationship between environmental degradation and poverty. Environmental degradation is both a cause and consequence of poverty. The slum is the poster child of urban environmental degradation. Poverty puts pressure on people to engage in unsustainable and environmentally unfriendly practices.

In order to address the issues of poverty and sustainability on a global scale, The Millennium Declaration was adopted in September 2000. All the member countries of the United Nations agreed on a set of international development targets, designed to help create a better world. Consequently, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were put forward. These goals include those dedicated to eradicating poverty, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensuring environmental

sustainability and developing a global partnership for development. Nigeria is a signatory to the Millennium Declaration and has a responsibility to implement the MDGs locally.

Today's Nigerian city, according to Mabogunje (2002) is typified by substandard and inadequate housing, slums, and lack of infrastructure, transportation problems, low productivity, crime and juvenile delinquency. Poverty is also endemic in Nigerian cities. While available statistics put the national poverty level at 70% as at 2004(UNDP), a number of real indicators show that the current poverty level is actually higher than that.

Lagos represents the epitome of urban decay. The metropolis is replete with environmental problems ranging from slums and squatter settlements, to crime and delinquency. As far back as 1984, 42 settlements had been identified as blighted (UNCHS/Lagos State Government). The number has risen to about 100 as at 2004 (UN-Habitat/Lagos State Government). This paper, therefore seeks to inquire into the relationship between poverty and the environmental problems in the Lagos metropolis. In order to sharpen the focus of the enquiry, the paper looks into the concepts of poverty and environmental degradation, traces the incidence of these problems from physical, sociological and management perspectives and analyses the effects of these issues on sustainable urban development. The paper concludes by advancing urban planning strategies for achieving both poverty management and environmental sustainability and thus meeting the targets of the Millennium Development Goals.

URBAN POVERTY AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION – CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

Poverty can be said to refer to specific forms and levels of deprivation, which impose major limitations on normal human functioning and existence (Akinyele, 1994). Poverty is inseparably linked to lack of control over resources including land, skills, knowledge, capital and social connections. (United Nations, 1996).

Section 38 of the Federal Environmental Protection Agency Act defines the environment as including water, air, land and all plants and human beings or animals living therein and the inter-relationships that exist between and among them. Degradation connotes reducing the quality of a thing (Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary). Environmental Degradation can thus be described as the process of reducing the quality of the environment. Koleosho and Adeyinka (2006) refer to environmental degradation as those activities that render the environment unhealthy and unsustainable over time.

Environmental degradation and poverty are inextricably intertwined, resulting in a vicious cycle in which poverty causes environmental stress, which in turn perpetuates more poverty. When the physical environment in and around cities deteriorates, those most affected are the urban poor.

Poverty puts pressure on people to engage in unsustainable and ecologically damaging practices. Bartone (1991) discovered that the urban poor, confined to economically fragile and ecologically vulnerable areas, contribute to the incidence of environmental degradation and urban congestion. According to him, economic disadvantages usually as a result of unemployment/ underemployment are the root causes of urban poverty and environmental degradation. Environmental degradation creates slums, shantytowns and squatter settlements. Akinbode (2002) corroborates this by saying that the concentration of the poor in unplanned settlements leads to the emergence of slums and shantytowns. The urban poor converge in certain geographic loci within the city. These loci, which have been identified by Aina(1990) as shantytowns are deprived settlements characterized by very high residential density, largely uninhabitable housing, and absence of sanitation, basic infrastructure and social services. George (2002) describes a slum as an environment in which a set of forces interact to give rise to a devalued physical and social image of an area by the larger community. Squatter settlements are uncontrolled illegal and temporary settlements.

Slums, shantytowns and squatter settlements exhibit similar characteristics. These include poor sanitary surroundings, dilapidated structures, high occupancy ratio, physical dullness of surroundings in terms of landscaping and social amenities, inadequate provision or complete lack of public facilities, absentee landlords, low rent, haphazard architectural design and general features of vandalism.

Poverty is an enormous threat to the political stability, social cohesion and environmental balance of our cities and until it is tackled decisively, sustainable urban development will remain a mirage.

CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH – THE LAGOS METROPOLIS

The study is set in the Lagos Metropolis, Lagos state, South Western Nigeria, on the narrow coastal plain of the Bight of Benin. The metropolis, an estimated 300 square kilometres, is a group of islands endowed with creeks and a lagoon. The city began in the fifteenth century as a Portuguese trading post exporting ivory, peppers, and slaves, and comprises settlements that have grown from predominantly farming and fishing villages to highly urbanized settlements. Lagos metropolis is inhabited by about 80% of the population of the Lagos State making it the most urbanized state in Nigeria today. With a population of over 10 million people, it is regarded as a mega city (Mabogunje, 2002). Lagos is the commercial and industrial hub of Nigeria; this has attracted a high rate of migrants to the city.

The lagos metropolis is an environmental disaster. The city reflects the epitome of contemporary urban decay; from overcrowded tenements, desecrated environment to growing crime. According to Nubi and Omirin (2006), a 2002 survey revealed that over 70% of the built up area of the Lagos metropolis is

blighted. According to UNDP (2004), 51% of male residents and 54% of female residents of Metropolitan Lagos are poor.

POVERTY AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION IN THE LAGOS METROPOLIS: MATTERS ARISING

Urban development problems in Lagos could be viewed from both socio-economic and environmental perspectives. Increase in the urban population has resulted in the proliferation of slums and shantytowns. The proliferation of these shantytowns results in the unwieldy expansion of the urban centers, which poses a major planning problem as the provision and management of roads, drainage and sewage systems among other infrastructure proves very difficult. Furthermore, shantytowns cause increases in the incidence of urban poverty, diseases and epidemics, environmental pollution, urban conflicts and crime.

The prevalent problems in the Lagos metropolis are Physical/Environmental, Cultural/Sociological and Managerial. (Mabogunje(1981), Egunjobi(1999), Olayiwola (2000),Oduwaye and Ogundele (2006) .

1. **Physical or Environmental Problems:** include conflicting land uses such as the infiltration of commercial land uses on housing as the case in Festac town; complete succession on Allen Avenue and Awolowo roads; poor aesthetics and unsightly cityscape, high building density and high rate of building collapse such as the recent one at Ebute Metta, and invasion of informal shanties in planned areas. Infrastructure problems include narrow and poorly constructed roads, mostly without provision for drainage. Other environmental problems include traffic congestion, pollution(noise, atmospheric and water),flooding and ocean surge etc. These problems are particularly prevalent in areas that are inhabited by the poor. Due to the rapid population expansion and rapid urbanization being witnessed in the Metropolis, more people, especially the poor inhabit ecologically vulnerable areas such as Ijeh, Amukoko, Makoko among others. Atmospheric pollution is high in Olusosun and Ojota; Ajegunle and Orile are prone to flooding while building collapse is high in Ketu, Ebute Metta, Ajegunle and Orile. Although the Lagos State Public Health Bye law recommends a room occupancy rate of 2 persons per room, as at 2004, occupancy rates vary from 1.4 in low density Apapa to 3.6 in medium density Surulere and 8.0 in high density Mushin (UNDP/LASG.). See Table I below

Table 1: Household Size and Density in Some Local Government Areas of Lagos Metropolis in 2004

Local Govt	Status By Income	People Per Room	Household Size
Eti Osa	High	1.6	5.6
Apapa	High	1.4	4.8
Ajeromi Ifelodun	Low	5.8	5.8
Lagos Island	Low	5.4	10.8
Mushin	Low	8.0	8.0
Surulere	Middle	2.0	4.8

Source: State of the Lagos Megacity Report (2004)

- 2. Sociological or Cultural Problems:** prevalence of miscreants i.e. area boys, crime and juvenile delinquency, ethnic clashes, high population density, political violence, public ignorance and apathy, environmental health crises. All these issues are dominant in the shanty towns. Area boys are mainly located in the slums of Mushin, Shitta and Isale Eko. Land disputes and extortion, usually accompanied by widespread violence are quite common among the Omo-Oniles of Ajah and other emerging settlements around the metropolis. Ethnic clashes usually occur in the shantytowns of Idi Araba and Ladipo-Mushin. Environmental health crises are quite common in low income areas. High incidence of sexually transmitted were recorded in the low income settlements of Ipodo-Ikeja and Tolu-Ajgunle (Nwokoro and Okusipe, 2002). Political skirmishes are also widespread in low income areas. Crime is also higher in the low income areas of Agege(853) and Somolu (800), compared to the middle and high income areas of Surulere(321), Apapa (238) and Eti Osa(140) as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Crimes reported in Some Local Government Areas of Lagos Metropolis in 2005

Local Govt	Status By Income	Entry and Stealing	Armed Robbery	Bank Robbery	Threatening and Violence	Common Assault	Murder	False Pretence	Car Theft	Sudden and Unnatural Death	Total
Eti Osa	High	10	16	1	4	23	1	22	62	1	140
Apapa	High	8	12	2	4	34	4	52	120	2	238
Ikeja	Middle	12	34	6	8	23	8	22	101	3	217
Surulere	Middle	8	14	4	6	44	11	44	186	4	321
Kosofe	Low	15	25	2	10	65	20	48	129	13	327
Oshodi Isolo	Low	12	16	4	28	188	12	12	200	10	482
Somolu	Low	122	100	1	87	300	22	54	102	12	800
Agege	Low	128	80	2	63	205	41	82	234	18	853
Total		315	297	22	210	882	119	336	1134	63	3378

Source: Nigeria Police Crime Report (2005)

3. Environmental Management Problems: legislative bottlenecks, technical inadequacies and lack of manpower, lack of public participation and corruption. These include the loopholes in the Land Use Decree of 1978 that are yet to be revised, close to three decades later; selective implementation of the Urban and Regional Planning Decree 88 of 1992, paucity of qualified officers on the field and the inability of government to remunerate workers adequately. Community participation is also not being implemented. Planning is still basically “for the people”, rather than being “with the people”. Therefore, planning ends up not being sustainable as the people do not feel a sense of responsibility to their environment. Furthermore, the problems of the Lagos Metropolis are compounded because Lagos is a city that does not have citywide administration. There is an overlap of functions and activities by all the local governments, and consequently, friction, conflicts and waster of public funds. This corroborates the opinion of Okoye and Olatunbara(1993) who posit that if constituent local governments of a large metropolis plan and manage their own sections of the area, there are bound to be conflicts and narrowness in outlook. Overlap of functions of the various environmental management agencies is also an issue. The case of LASTMA, FRSC and FERMA is an example.

It is obvious that in the Lagos Metropolis, poverty has a dire effect on the general environment. It is obvious that a lot of work needs to be done if Lagos is to meet the targets of the Millennium Development goals that Nigeria has committed to. The major problems of urban development and sustainability are prevalent across the city and particularly evident in the numerous slums and shantytowns inhabited by the poor and deprived. The poor, who make up a significant proportion of the urban population are the most vulnerable in periods of health crises and environmental hazards, therefore immediate intervention in the environment is crucial in order to avoid a catastrophic event occurring soon.

The following section therefore is dedicated to the position of this paper, which is how urban planning strategies can be employed in the achievement of sustainable urbanization.

RECOMMENDATIONS: TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE LAGOS MEGACITY

Effective urban poverty control can only be actualized through the application of a pragmatic approach involving civic reorientation, urban redevelopment and the entrenchment of a result-oriented system of urban management. This can be achieved through Good Urban Governance.

Good Urban Governance: Urban Governance is defined by UN-Habitat (2002) as the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, plan and manage the common affairs of the city. It is

a continuing process through which conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated and cooperative action can be taken. It includes formal institutions as well as informal arrangements and the social capital of citizens. Good Urban Governance implies that city governments respond to and are accountable to all urban residents, including the poor. It implies inclusive and participatory approaches in which each group and stakeholder has adequate representation. Through good urban governance, citizens are provided with the platform which will allow them to use their talents to the full to improve their social and economic conditions.

Good urban governance is characterized by the following norms:

- i. Sustainability in all dimensions of urban development
- ii. Subsidiarity of authority and resources to the closest appropriate level
- iii. Equity of access to decision making processes and the basic necessities of urban life
- iv. Efficiency in the delivery of public services and in promoting local economic development
- v. Transparency and Accountability of decision makers and all stakeholders
- vi. Civic Engagement and Citizenship
- vii. Security of individuals and their living environment

These norms, which are independent, and mutually enforcing are responsive to the issues of the urban poor. Practical Means of applying these norms especially with regards to the Lagos Metropolis are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Principles, Objectives and Practical Measures for Applying the Norms of Good Governance to the Lagos Metropolis

PRINCIPLES	OBJECTIVES	PRACTICAL MEASURES
SUSTAINABILITY	Balanced Social, Economic and Environmental Priorities	- Undertaking consultations with stakeholders to agree on a broad-based mission statement and long term strategic vision for the city using relevant development strategies
	Stakeholder Involvement	- Ensuring financial viability by promoting economic activity through the participation of all citizens - Stakeholders should nominate the beneficiaries of projects - Promote the transfer of appropriate technologies
SUBSIDIARITY	Local Autonomy and Accountability	- In consultation with community organizations, develop clear constitutional framework for assigning and delegating responsibilities and commensurate powers and resources from the wards through to the neighborhood levels - Promote decentralized cooperation and peer – to – peer learning
EQUITY	Resource Allocation	- Establish investment incentives for targeted sectors and geographic areas
	Empowerment	- Ensure both women and men have equal access to decision making processes - Establish quotas for women representatives in both the Local Monitoring Committees and the programme beneficiaries - Ensure Development Policies support the Informal Sector
EFFICIENCY	Management and Service Delivery	- Promote integrated inter-sect oral planning and management
	Efficient Investment in Infrastructure	- Regulate public services through partnerships with the private and civil society sectors
TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	Transparent and Accountable Decision Making Process	- Organize regular open consultations with citizens on important issues such as participatory budgeting and monitoring mechanisms - Create public feedback mechanisms such as hotlines, procedures for public petitioning and public interest litigation
	Access to Information	- Promote the publics right of access to information
	High Standard of Ethics and Professional Conduct	- Develop practical and enforceable standards of accountability and service delivery especially with political office holders
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND CITIZENSHIP	Leadership for Public Participation	- Make use of mechanisms such as town hall meetings, citizens fora, and issue specific workgroups
	Building Democratic Culture	- Promote civic responsibility especially with regards to voting for responsible leadership and protecting community property
	Enablement	- Enable equal contribution of men and women and the full participation of the citizenry in civic life
SECURITY	Environmental Management and Disaster Preparedness	- Implement environmental planning and management methodologies based on stakeholder involvement
	Personal Safety, Crime Control and Prevention	- Create a culture of peace by encouraging tolerance of diversity through public awareness campaigns
	Security of Tenure and Livelihoods	- Promote security of livelihoods particularly for the urban poor through appropriate legislation and access to employment, credit and education.

CONCLUSION

Applying the norms of good governance to the planning and administration of the Lagos Megacity will significantly help in addressing both urban poverty and environmental degradation. The Lagos Metropolis can be revolutionized by the decentralization of responsibilities and resources to the local councils based on the principles of subsidiarity and accountability; encouraging the participation of civil society especially women in the design, implementation and monitoring of local priorities based on the principle of civic engagement. Furthermore, building the capacity of all actors to contribute fully to decision making and urban development processes based on the principles of equity and efficiency; facilitating networking at all levels by the principle of civic engagement; and based on the principles of sustainability and security, taking full advantage of modern information and communication technologies to support good urban governance and sustainable urban development will result in improved welfare for the community.

It is an international consensus that good governance is a crucial pre-requisite for poverty eradication. It is also acknowledged as being critical for unleashing national energies for development (UN -Habitat, 2002). Positive institutional responses at the local level contribute to a significant reduction in poverty, therefore in order to meet the Millennium Development Goals, it is imperative that the principles of good governance are adopted and promoted for both regeneration and the mitigation of poverty in our urban communities.

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