COMBATING THE CHALLENGES OF RISE IN URBAN SLUMS IN CITIES IN DEVELOPING WORLD:

A CASE STUDY OF LAGOS STATE.

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Abstract

Lagos State is an urban complex that embodies tremendous contrasts. As the former national capital and the major port of the largest country in Africa, it is a magnet for migrants from all over Nigeria and neighbouring countries alike. Hence, Lagos state attained the status of a megacity with a population estimate of over 15 million inhabitants with an attendant housing and infrastructural development problems.

The objective of this paper is to address how to stem the tide of negative development experienced in Lagos in the planning of other developing cities in Nigeria, most especially in the new Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

The paper is narrative and historical in methodology. Thus, the paper embarks on a comprehensive literature study of the historical development of Lagos State with a view to determining how it resulted into a megacity with an inadequate level of infrastructural development to match its status, which subsequently gave rise to development of urban slums and squatter settlements within the metropolis. The paper concludes by giving recommendations on how to improve infrastructural facilities, upgrade urban slums and squatter settlements without necessarily resulting into house demolitions or outright eviction of people from their abode.

Key words: slums, squatter settlement, megacity, urbanisation

INTRODUCTION

Societies in pre-independence Africa countries have been predominantly rural for the most part of their history. By the mid-20th century, most Africa countries began to gain independence from their colonial masters which led to apparent changes in their social and economic lives. The emerging independent countries experienced a rapid and profound reorientation of their social and economic lives that caused attraction towards cities leading to urbanism. Urbanization was first noticeable in the state capitals and later in various expanding cities and trade routes.

Nigeria has experienced a phenomenal growth in population and urbanization, but its experience has also been unique in scale, in pervasiveness, and in historical antecedents. Nigeria became an independent country on October 1, 1960 with her capital in Lagos. It became a republic on October 1, 1963, thus breaking all the ties with British colonialist.

AN OVERVIEW OF HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF LAGOS STATE

Lagos, an old Yoruba town, beginning in the 15th century, grew as a trade centre and seaport. (Okusipe, 2003). From the 1820s until it became a British colony, Lagos was a notorious centre of the slave trade. According to Okusipe (2003), "Britain annexed the city in 1861, both to tap the trade in palm products and other goods with the interior and to suppress the slave trade". In 1906, Lagos was joined with the British protectorate of southern Nigeria. In 1914, when southern and northern Nigeria was amalgamated, it became part of the coastal colony of Nigeria. In 1954, most of the colonies were merged with the rest of Nigeria, but Lagos was made a separate federal territory. From the late 19th century to independence in 1960, Lagos was the centre of Nigeria planning ideas and movement. From independence until 1991, Lagos was the capital of Nigeria. The capital was then moved to Abuja, although some governmental departments remain in Lagos.

Pre-independence era, Lagos served as the political and commercial nerve centre of the nation due to its coastline. The British colonialist found the coastline appropriate for export of goods from the hinterland of Nigeria, and also facilitated trade in slaves. Thus, they settled down first in Lagos before moving into other lucrative centres in the hinterland of the country. The colonial masters created a segregated area in Lagos for their residences. These areas were known as government reserved areas (GRAs), the name it still bears till today in places like Ikeja, Apapa, and Ikoyi.

The GRAs consist of European-style housing, a hospital or nursing station, and other facilities such as educational, recreational, and religious facilities for the British colonials and the more prominent European trading community. The GRA formed an expatriate enclave, which was deliberately separated from the indigenous Lagosians areas, ostensibly to control sanitation and limit the spread of diseases such as malaria. It is evident therefore that the GRAs were characterized with decent urban planning and decent housing conditions.

In post-independent era, immediately after independence on 1st October, 1960 Lagos became the Federal Capital. The GRAs erstwhile inhabited by the British colonials, gradually became upper income suburbs, which later spread out into surrounding farmlands as well as inward to fill in the space that formerly separated the GRAs from the rest of the city. New institutions such as university campuses, government office complexes, hospitals, and hotels, were also added but at the fringes of the city. The space that originally separated them from the denser areas was then filled in as further growth occurred.

Present Situation in Lagos Metropolitan Area

The "oil boom" of the 1970 and 1980 brought about an unprecedented prosperity and development of the nation with primary focus being on Lagos State, the then Federal Capital. There were massive improvements on infrastructural development. New roads

were constructed with bridges linking the Lagos Mainland with the Island to ease accessibility of people. There were also growing manufacturing industries, large construction companies, and governmental institutions, along with a great variety of small business enterprises, many in the informal sector. AllRefer Reference stated that:

> *The most notorious example of urban growth in Nigeria has undoubtedly been Lagos, its most important commercial centre. The city has shot up in size since the 1960s; its annual growth rate was estimated at almost 14 percent during the 1970s, when the massive extent of new construction was exceeded only by the influx of migrants attracted by the booming prosperity.*

Lagos is an urban complex that embodies tremendous contrasts. As the former national capital and the major port of the largest country in Africa, it is a powerful magnet for migrants from all over Nigeria. The rapid urban growth which Nigeria has experienced is well manifested in Lagos, the major parts of which are the product of modern economic, social and political forces in interaction with traditional culture which was the factor that distinguished life in the city from that in the countryside.

Consequent upon that, the vast majority of salaried jobs, the increased opportunity to connect with the rich and powerful, opportunity for great varieties of informal sector business enterprises, and the excitement of night life that was non-existent in most rural areas, were some of the factors that made the city lively and attractive. The pull into Lagos State became increasingly phenomenal that the State has become legendary for its congestion and other urban problems.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Like many young metropolises in developing countries, Lagos does not have the adequate supporting framework of urban infrastructure. Ajanlekoko (2001) also observed that:

> *"the phenomenal rise in population, number and size of our cities over the past few years have manifested in the acute shortage of dwelling units which resulted in overcrowding, high rents, poor urban living*

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conditions, and low infrastructure services and indeed high crime rates"

There is no city in Nigeria where the "housing failure" is more manifest than in Lagos (UNCHS, 1993). It went on further to state that "the legal acquisition of land is far beyond the means of most people , as buildable land is in short supply; opportunities for employment are very limited and the rate of population increase is high, thereby compounding the problematic housing situation".

It is common knowledge that prospective rental seekers in Lagos have to queue up for more than a year on the waiting list before they can even be considered eligible for or become fortunate enough to secure a rental unit. Ownership of a house is only a dream realised by only the upper 5 per cent of the income groups in Lagos (UNCHS, 1993). Sometimes prospective renters are persuaded to assist landlords to finance the construction of a rental house by paying one or two years rent in advance, in order to rent a room/rooms or flat whenever it is completed (Achunine, 1977: 8-9).

It is an accepted fact also that more migrants move into Lagos more than into any other city in Nigeria apart from Abuja which is also becoming notorious in influx of migrants. In order to cope with the fast rising population in Lagos, it has been estimated that about 100,000 additional residential units are required each year (UNCHS, 1993). However, there is evidence that nothing near this target is being built each year, either by government and its housing agencies or by private/public sector participation.

The immediate consequence of this is that in many parts of Lagos, especially where the poor and low-income people live, there is congestion, inadequate infrastructural facilities for the ever-increasing demands place on them, inadequate provision of water supply, power and poor methods of waste disposal. Such inadequacies place a tremendous impact on the production of housing. Sometimes it has led to demolition, eviction, inaccessibility, substandard houses and many are outright uninhabitable.

The individuals affected most by this conditions are the poor, low-income earners and urban migrants. These people with little resources, financial and otherwise, have adopted the option of illegally occupying a piece of vacant land to build rudimentary or make-shift houses. These factors have been observed to be the main catalyst that leads to increase in urban slums and squatter settlements in developing cities.

DEFINITION OF SLUMS AND SQUATTER SETTLEMENTS

UNCHS (2002) defined a slum variously has "a term used to describe a wide range of low-income settlements and/or poor human living conditions". The definition also encompasses housing areas that were once respectable or even desirable, but which have since deteriorated, as the original owners have moved to new or better areas of the cities. The term slum, has, however come to include also the vast informal settlements that are quickly becoming the most visual expression of urban poverty (UNCHS, 2002). The quality of dwellings in such settlements varies from the simples shack to permanent structures, while access to water, electricity, sanitation and other basic services and infrastructure tends to be limited.

The Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (2003) defined a slum as "a densely populated usually urban area marked by crowding, dirty run-down housing, poverty, and social disorganization".

A squatter settlement on the other hand is a land (especially public or unoccupied land) settled on by resident urban poor or rural urban-urban migrants (squatters), without right or title.

WHY DO SLUMS CONTINUE TO EXIST?

There are various reasons why slums still exist and why they will continue to exist despite various interventions by the public and private sectors. One of such reasons is the

inability of formal shelter delivery systems to cope with demand. The simplest answer

relates to the economic logic of land and housing markets. A change from policies of

interventions to liberalization has consequently brought about an increase in

commercialisation of land and housing markets. And as rightly pointed out in UNCHS

(1993), "in any commercial market, choice is a positive function of income". The

consequences is that the very poor have no choice in housing at all, and have to live

where no else chooses to live. Secondly, slum development is closely linked to general

economic development as it relates to employment and wages. As stated recently in the

Habitat Debate; Slums "play a useful role in providing cheap (though not necessarily

cheerful) housing for those who cannot or, as likely, will not, want to spend more on

housing than they possibly can" (UNCHS, 1993).

THE EXPERIENCES WITH SLUM DEVELOPMENT IN LAGOS STATE

Arcot Ramachandran, an Executive Director of the United Nations Commission on

Human Settlements (UNCHS) in his foreword in the UNCHS (1993) publication on

Upgrading of Urban Slums and Squatter Areas said "One of the most serious challenges

that human settlements face today especially in the large cities of developing countries is

the spread of urban slums and squatter areas."

Recent report published by UN-HABITAT's new Global Report on Human Settlements

(2003) states that:

> *The world's slums are growing, and growing, with the number of*
> *people living in such dire conditions now at the 1 billion mark –*
> *making up 32 percent of the global urban population. In developing*
> *regions, slum dwellers account for 43 percent of the population in*
> *contrast to about 6 percent in more developed regions. In sub-Saharan*
> *Africa, the proportion of urban residents in slums is highest at 71.9*
> *percent.*

Going by the percentages postulated by the UN-HABITAT's report, it means that a large

percentage of people are living in slum-like condition which can be attested to by the

growing number of squatter settlements in Lagos State. Lagos State has witnessed a phenomenal rise in population in the last decade without adequate housing and an increase provision of services. The State with a projected population estimate of 15 million inhabitants is ranked among the world's most populated cities, with a large junk of the inhabitants being mostly rural-urban migrants (urban squatters).

The priorities of the urban squatter which include opportunity for better life, employment opportunities and the likes, changes over time depending on various conditions that they find themselves. But one of the dilemmas they are faced with and which persists for a long period is the question of adequate housing. However, with little resources, financial or otherwise, skills or access to them, the drastic option of illegally occupying a vacant piece of land to build a rudimentary shelter seems to be the only option available to urban squatters and the urban poor.

Hence, some parts of metropolitan Lagos have been taken over by urban migrants and vast and sprawling slums are developing in such areas due to lack of basic infrastructural facilities. Such areas include Makoko, Ijora-badiya, Ajegunle, Otto, Bariga, Okokomaiko and the erstwhile Maroko. The lack of basic services and infrastructures that make for decent living condition in these areas, the substandard housing units, filthy and unplanned society and indeed the high crime rates makes it to be of concern to the Lagos State government. Srinivas (2004a) noted that "the problem is further compounded by the apathy and even antipathy of various government agencies who view the "invasion" of urban areas by the "masses" and the development of squatter settlements as a social "evil" that has to be "eradicated".

The consequence of this is the frequent demolitions of houses and properties of urban squatters on government land whenever such landed property is needed by the authority concerned. The case of Maroko is still fresh on the mind of Lagosians and fresher on the minds of those whose houses were not spared by the effect of the demolitions.

Maroko was regarded as a "no mans" land by urban squatters and urban poor, so it became a sprawling settlement for them. Maroko had none of the infrastructures that make for decent living – no water, population explosion, poor sanitary conditions and indeed, general poor urban living conditions. It became the largest slum in the nation within a very short time, and the poor living condition of the inhabitants became a source of what seemed to be a genuine concern by the then Military Administrator of Lagos State, Col. Raji Rasaki. There was an overwhelming support for the demolition of the squatter settlement by environmentalists, but on the condition that the affected squatters will be relocated by the government. The consensus was that the displaced squatters will be given first priorities in buying houses from the low-cost housing scheme proposed for the demolished slum in three locations, namely Ikota, Ilasan and Ikorodu housing estates. The 300,000 residents of Maroko were squatters on government land. The government claimed that Maroko's environment was dangerous so it was cleared in the public interest and to make life better for those evicted (Agbola et al, 1997). He stated further that "Of the estimated 41,776 house-owning households displaced from Maroko, only 2.933 were considered for relocation to small flats in government housing estates but many of them were not ready for occupation; some were even waterlogged". He concluded thus "most of the relocated residents are very dissatisfied with their new accommodation. Many evicted households settled near the beach in newer squatter housing built from materials taken from the ruins of Maroko".

It is not news that Maroko was eventually demolished. What became news was that what seemed to be a genuine concern of the government to the urban poor for decent housing, turned out to be a selfish interest. Hence the land claimed from the demolition was sold out to the rich at the expense of the urban poor.

COMBATING THE CHALLENGES OF URBAN SLUMS IN LAGOS STATE.

A squatter settlement which eventually leads to a slum is an inevitable phenomenon on the landscape of every urban centre. The main arguments for the clearance of slums have been linked to their potential has breeding grounds of political dissents, disease, crime and prostitution. Many slum removal initiatives have in fact had the removal of a perceived eyesore as their primary objective. Unfortunately for such initiatives (but not surprisingly), poor people tend to remain poor even when their houses have been demolished. As long as Lagos State continues to offer economic opportunities such as salaried jobs, varieties of informal sector business enterprises, and the excitement of life, it will always continue to attract migrants from rural and smaller urban areas into the city, leading to more squatting and eventually more slums.

The pertinent question is, how can the problem of slum development in Lagos State be solved? Considering the inevitability of squatting by urban poor, there is no "quick fix" solution to the problem of slum development. However, the following suggested solutions will go a long way in providing succour to the problem of slum development in Lagos State.

a) **Slum Upgrade.**

Considering the magnitude and scale of the housing deficit, and the lack of concerted action or inadequate response on the part of government, both at Federal and State level, and the pervasive poor socio-economic state of the nation, with over 70% of the population living on less than 1 dollar per day, then there is no doubt about the positive role that squatter housing plays in housing the families of the millions of the urban poor.

However, the onus is on the government to prevent this squatter housing from developing into full blown slums which will subsequently lead to the difficult decision of demolitions. It is therefore suggested that instead of government and

public authorities of Lagos State taking a confrontational attitude of demolition threat, they should strive to create an enabling environment under which people, using and generating their own resources, could find unique local solutions for their housing and shelter needs. This conceptual approach is referred to as slum upgrade.

The concept envisages a situation whereby the Lagos State government passes a bill through the State Assembly, urging inhabitants of identified slums within the metropolis to upgrade their houses to a minimum standard, as specified by the physical planning authorities within a window period ranging from 18-24 months. It should be emphasized that defaulters after the window period will have penalties as deemed fit by the planning authority.

b) **Sites-and-Services Schemes**.

The proliferation of slums and squatter settlements could be nipped in the bud simply by improving the environmental quality of these areas and by government providing the basic necessary infrastructure. This concept is known as the "sites-and-services schemes. Srinivas (2004b) defined "sites-and-services as the provision of plots of land, either on ownership or land lease tenure, along with a bare minimum of essential infrastructure needed for habitation".

The problem of providing adequate housing has long been a concern, not only of individuals but of governments at Federal and State level as well. Government has made effort to ameliorate the housing problem by providing a "complete" serviced house scheme which they referred to as low-cost housing. However, it is not news that the low-cost housing cannot be sustained by the government to meet the needs of the teeming population and most importantly, most low-income families simply cannot afford the so-called low-cost housing.

The sites-and services scheme approach advocated the role of government agencies only in the preparation of parcels or plots of land with certain basic infrastructure,

which was to be sold outright to those that can afford it or to be leased to other low-income beneficiaries. The basic infrastructures to be provided in a housing scheme by the government apart from the plot of land are roads, water supply, drainage, electricity or a sanitary network.

The peculiarity of sites-and-services schemes which made it to be a workable and acceptable concept of housing provision for the low-income class is that it adopts the same basic principle of the development of a squatter settlement but without degenerating into slums. This is achieved by leaving the actual house building to the beneficiaries themselves to use their own resources, such as informal finance or family labour and various other types of community participation modes to build their own houses. Another feature of the sites-and-services scheme is that the beneficiaries could also build their houses at their on pace, depending on the availability of financial and other resources.

c). **Embracing Earth Building Technology**

Apart from providing social security, the role of government is also to meet the welfare needs of the citizenry. One of the major welfare needs of the citizenry is availability of adequate housing.

Lagos State government has made considerable effort in housing delivery for the masses, but all attempts seem to be like a drop of water in an ocean due to the enormous of the problem. Aina (2004) in a report in The Punch Newspaper titled Lagos Spends #10bn on Housing wrote:

> *The Commissioner for Housing, Mr. Wahab Owokoniran, stated that the state government had spent #10billion on different housing schemes in the state. According to him, people criticize the cost of delivering houses in the state as expensive, but this is not true considering the fact that building materials used for the housing schemes are imported.*

The effort of the Lagos State government in housing delivery is commendable but the question is, who are the expected beneficiaries of the housing schemes built with

imported materials considering the fact that 70% of Nigerians live in abject poverty (less than 1 dollar per day)? The strong opinion being canvassed in this paper is that earth building technology should be embraced and developed to provide low-cost housing that are indeed affordable by the low-income earners and the urban poor. Earth building technology involves the use of laterite and loamy soil that exist in abundant supply in all parts of the State. Earth had been used by our fathers and fore-fathers to erect buildings, sometimes up to 2 storeys high without addition of any other reinforcing materials and most of them are still standing till date. The first storey building in Nigeria which is 160 years old was built of earth. Building with earth apart from been economical, has been proved to be strong and durable. Cement based materials (sandcrete block, cement mortar, concrete lintels, cement plaster), are the major factors that contribute to the high cost of building a house due to the high cost of cement. It is pertinent to note that most Nigerians look down on earth buildings as either not good or a poor man's solution to problem of housing. Little wonder that the Lagos State government had to import building materials from abroad.

The submission of this paper is that with the use of soil block, it will facilitate house ownership as it is capable of reducing substantially building cost through the use of less expensive, but abundant soil blocks that are less dependent on cement. With the abundance and availability of earth as a building material there is a guarantee that when the appropriate technology is applied, housing delivery will be made more efficient and cheaper.

CONCLUSION

Lagos State has witnessed tremendous population growth rate from pre-independence to post-independence era, bringing with it attendant problems such as lack of infrastructures, lack of

adequate and decent housing to mention just a few. The United Nations (UN) coined the term "megacities" initially to describe cities with 8 million or more inhabitants; the UN's present threshold for megacity status is 10 million. Currently, the UN lists 17 megacities, all but four in developing countries (An Urban Future).

Lagos state is listed among one of the 17 megacities. A sizeable percentage of the inhabitants of the State live in squatter settlements and slums, a phenomenon which have become inevitable in all urban areas. There is no "quick fix" solution to the problem of squatting and slum development but it could be nipped in the bud. One of such approaches is the slum upgrade option, which will remove the confrontational attitude of government to squatting, and rather create an enabling environment under which inhabitants of such settlements could use and generate their own resources, using unique local solutions to solve their housing and shelter problems within a specified period.

The sites-and-services scheme approach solves housing problem by recognizing the ability of people to house themselves, with a little backing from government and its agencies. Hence, it reduces the role of government from being a "provider" to an "enabler", thus enabling government to save scarce resources by "sharing" the responsibility of housing with the intended beneficiaries.

With the proper implementation of these approaches, the society will be the better for it.

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