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Achieving healthy environmental sustainability in Ota housing core

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ABSTRACT

Many challenges of Nigerian urban built environment for over three decades have centered on poor state of infrastructure and services. The numerous effects of rapid urbanization process on housing environment have been identified in Ota - a nodal town that currently accommodates many unwarranted environmental conditions of which environmental degradation and infrastructural decay are obvious manifestation. The environmental audits and surveys carried out in Ota reveals lots of evidences of poor living condition especially among the residents of the old residential enclave of the town.

Apparently many reviewed urban revitalization literatures are perceived to have played an important role in the policy towards sustainable development of cities. The study achieves this through a copious review of literature in urban renewal programmes which helps in drawing out many effective urban renewal strategies for Nigerian cities.

The study concludes that any development Programme in Ota town should involve Communities participation (also called bottom-up approach). In other words the idea of recognizing contributions by various actors enhances participatory development.

1. Introduction

Many challenges of Nigerian urban built environment for over three decades have centered on poor state of infrastructure and services; its quality which is shown by the condition of conservation of the urban landscape and deterioration of cultural, architectural and historic heritage of individual or groups buildings. It is also a fact that for this long period of time there was little or no tangible successes achieved even in those cities where there were corporate governance political leaders. Meanwhile the whole neglect of this aspect of living in Africa has led to many cities without any definite character that the inhabitants can touch or proud of environmental wise. Arguably, Cities that invest in maintaining or rescuing the quality of the built environment make direct contact with the inhabitants, allow them to identify with the quality of urban life and arouse their interest in environmental matters relating to local urban development (UNEP, 2002)

Urbanization process in its destructive contribution to world's population redistribution within a geographical area brought undue stresses to limited resources available a place even though it is a growth engine of the global economy. Developing economies have had a bitter experience in most of their urban areas as the population keeps growing faster than what resources in those places can bear. More worrisome is the inability of the governments of those deprived nations to effectively control the continuous negative consequences of population agglomeration in those areas. Worst hit are the living environment and the populace. Whereas the developed economies have been able to address the unwarranted side effect of population surges in urban setting through employment of effective governance, urban planning, and economic strategy in urban place. The developing economies have not taken concrete steps in solving this scourge. However, every level of government, the private and civic sectors need to collaborate cross jurisdictional boundaries. On the contrary the public policy and urban management (if it exists in the first place) today generally do not respond to the veracity of urban areas as essential market activity places, socio-cultural interaction, and transportation systems promoting centers. Akinola et al (2013) was of the opinion that urban renewal is an exercise which brings a rebirth to an environmentally devastated place is no doubt a complex task which is multi-dimensional and affects many interests. He stretched further that successful renewal process requires an integrated intervention which aims at physical, economic and social revitalization of the area. Many other problems faced by majority of human habitants across Africa and Asia are what we can call economic "citizens" of urban and semi-urban regions. These categories in most cases are not only politically estranged within their dynamic and rapidly growing urban agglomerations but much more economically deprived. In many regions the consequences of these activities are seen in the pattern of land-use planning dotted in the living environment which is far from any form of protection.

Many nations that are coming up to effect pragmatic change in the outlook of cities housing environment may need to learn tactical ways of ameliorating the challenge from other nations that have succeeded in the similar ordeal. In India for example, there have been institutionalization of good governance such that there is now an establishment of Centre for Good Governance and Reform where training programme is held for the government staff. Many action plans for slum development are prepared through a participatory process by the community groups incorporating infrastructure and human development needs through micro-planning process involving all members of the community.

In a like manner the Global Urban Development often tackles this 21st century challenge by developing cooperative partnerships among the public, private, and civic sectors in urban regions. These partnerships design and implement metropolitan economic strategies to generate increased prosperity; metropolitan land-use and transportation strategies to invest in infrastructure, manage growth, and enhance the urban environment; and metropolitan community development strategies that promote livable neighborhoods with improved housing, education, health, safety, and quality of life (Hall, 2005).

As a common factor and denominator in the framing and execution of the social and economic policies of nations, Ratcliff (1976), was of the view that the allocation, use and management of land should be done to guarantee access and equity, which the Land Use Act (1978), aimed to achieve in Nigeria. In particular, population increases arising from uncontrolled natural births and rural-urban migration, and a growing commercial sense, have combined to re-orientates the traditional communal land holding status of the Nigerian lands (Ola, 1983).

It is probably reasonable to say that our contemporary environmental action tends to work in a sort of reservoir around seemingly theoretical issues with incremental goals, perpetuating a very passive role for citizens.

Many Nigerian traditional urban centres had independently developed from historical point of view as prominent centres before the advent of colonialism; however, most of the settlements have not experienced the much needed all round transformation from their original traditional city status. For this reason there is now

existence of a dual natured township which allows juxtaposition of both modern and traditional towns co-existing side by sides in many cases. The phenomenal task has been that it is often very difficult blending the two natured cities into one for a common transformation. While the modern part of the city continues to develop more rapidly and remains environmentally conducive, the traditional section exhibits lots of hostilities to redevelopment and often exhibits a sort of slums character in all development areas.

With an estimated population of 163,783 is no doubt one of the major and well recognized old towns in Ogun State, Nigeria. As the headquarter of Ado-Odo/Ota Local Government Area, this industrial town has been under a traditional ruler known as Olota although his areas of influence is limited to traditional subject matters and the indigenous inhabitants. With the over congestion of Lagos (a Nigerian mega city) especially in recent years, there has been rapid flight or emergence of new industries in Ota. During the period of study, the town was reputed to be the third largest industrial town in Nigeria ranked next to Lagos –its closest neighbor, then Port-Harcourt. Moreover, with its notable nodal town identity, Ota provides a whole good linkage to Abeokuta city (its second nearest city), and other towns in the South-West Nigeria on one hand and other West African countries on the other.

Ota physical landscape in the past three decades has witnessed a tremendous growth especially with opening of more roads and boosting of industrial growth and emergence of big corporate organizations that offered job opportunities. The mega Winners church and the two universities (Covenant and Bells universities) have added significant impact to the built area of the town. All these show clearly that there has been an underestimation of the population growth of Ota town. Since 1980s, the Abeokuta-Lagos expressway has generated the greatest 0ta sprawl (particularly along the east and west ends of the town), followed by the Idiroko expressway (located west of the town). At the time of study, the town was spreading further into the neighbouring communities within the Ado-Odo/Ota local government jurisdiction, which include Iyesi, Iju, Onibokun, Atan, Ilogbo, Sango Communities.

From economic transformation point of view Ota can be said to have experienced tremendous economic growths considering many industries located in the town and the firms economic development planning and several other social or political determinism that had greater influence on the location of industries in the town. The current urban area extent measurement of Lagos using satellite imagery often indicates that urbanization of the fringe areas of the mega city including Ota town is occurring at a quickening pace. This expansion in the fringe areas is occurring in a largely unplanned and uncontrolled manner, creating sprawling low-density development that is uneconomical in terms of land use. As the town grows by filling in areas between older neighborhoods that lack roads, sewers and other infrastructure, problems are being created along the line and that may prove too costly to resolve down the road. In effect, commuters that ply Lagos-Ota axis face long traffic along Abeokuta-Lagos expressway on the poorly maintained federal government roads - a situation which is making life a miserable adventure for many commuters and has tendencies to continue into the future more particularly as migration rate keep surging along the west end of the town.

The foreseeable therapy this problem hinges in the implementation of the proposed rail transit between Ota town and Lagos mega city. If this is perfectly managed it will discourage car users from plying the already congested road.

At the moment, Ota core housing environment is slums laden. Most of the slums (that is, substandard houses and filthy environment) are concentrated within the oldest traditional core area of the town, which covers the entire indigenous portion or the core traditional residential area of the community. Many substandard houses are generally occupied by tenants on the legally built up areas of the town. Few of them are situated at the outskirts of the expanding town along some major roads or close to the adjoining local or rural communities. It must be emphasized here that slums in a place differs from one another by size, history, socio-economic and cultural features.

Agboola (1987) has identified two types of slum that have emerged in Nigerian urban areas. First is traditional slum arising in towns from the decay of existing structures, second slum type is spontaneous slum. This is often created by squatters on illegally acquired lands. In all assessment this pattern represents the majority of the slums in Ota.

2. Literature review

Urbanization and poor environmental attitude are two companions in many developing countries as revealed in all organized researches worldwide including United Nation. This scourge has had a toll in the backwardness in every attempt by governments of affected nations to revert to acceptable living condition of their citizens. Several efforts to improve the living conditions of slum dwellers (especially within developing countries) have been feeble and incoherent over the last decade or so, having peaked during the 1980s. However, renewed concern about poverty has recently led governments to adopt a specific target on slums in the United Nations Millennium Declaration, which aims to significantly improve the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by the year 2020. This report emphasizes the fact that slums have posed many challenges to human settlements development since the beginning of the new millennium. In nearly all cases slum areas have the highest concentrations of poor people and the worst shelter and physical environmental conditions. UN Habitat report (2003) reveals that the total number of slum dwellers in the world stood at about 924 million people in 2001. This represents about 32 per cent of the world's total urban population. At that time, 43 per cent of the combined urban populations of all developing regions including Nigeria lived in slums, while 78.2 per cent of the urban population in least developed countries was slum dwellers. By whatsoever assessment or interpretation given to it or may be used to describe the environmental situation of the study area, it will still be called a poorly organized town judging from its present physiographic outlook. At any rate the term 'slum' in this report is used to describe a wide range of low-income settlements and /or poor human living conditions. These inadequate housing conditions exemplify the variety of manifestations of poverty as defined in the programme of Action adopted at the World Summit for Social Development. In a more plain expression of the term, slum also has traditional connotation that is, housing areas that were once respectable or probably desirable but which have since deteriorated, as the original dwellers have moved to new and better areas of cities. The condition of the old houses has then declined, and the units have been progressively subdivided and rented out to lower-income groups. A typical example is the inner-city slums of many historical towns and cities in both the industrial and the developing countries.

Fundamentally, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS, 1996) has over the years established basic yardsticks in the area of human settlement sustainability to measure quality of life of inhabitants. These include measurement for scale of non-renewable resource use, extent of recycling and re-use of the scale and nature of renewable resource use, waste emanating from production and consumption activities as well as the impact of these wastes on environmental health and ecological systems. In order to achieve sustainable physical development in the less developed world the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (The Earth Summit) Agenda 21 outlined eight programmes (Oduwaye, 1999) namely: Promotion of adequate shelter for all; Improvement of human settlement management; Promotion of sustainable land use planning and management; Promotion of integrated provision of environmental infrastructure; Promotion of settlement planning and management in disaster-prone areas; Promotion of sustainable construction industry activities and Promotion of human resource development and capacity-building for human development.

The opinions of the generality of Environmentalists for a very long time on the issue of renewal are somehow related. The general policies and approaches usually adopted in urban revitalization are these five (Akinola et al, 2013), namely (1) Slum clearance: Demolition of dilapidated dwellings located in a slum; (2) Redevelopment: The demolition of existing buildings and their replacement by new buildings; (3) Rehabilitation: The repair and improvement of existing structurally sound properties; (4) Housing improvement: Improvements of dwellings by provision of essential basic amenities; (5) Conservation/ Preservation. However the main emphasis is to improve environmental conditions

3. Research Methodology

This study has adequately employed both qualitative and quantitative approaches in carrying out the true state of the area under investigation vis–a-vis the environmental condition of the town. In all intent it engages various housing and environmental audits within the core area of Ota. About 150 questionnaires were randomly administered to residents of some selected streets within the traditional core of the town. Between 1 and 9 houses were selected for the questionnaire administration in each street. Longer streets were allocated with more questionnaires than short street, except those streets that are purely considered as commercial strip for example Iganmode street is a commercial core of the traditional enclave of the town and very prominent at that. The retrieved 150 questionnaires were analyzed with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) which made it possible to determine the interrelationships among the different variables - such include house types,

conditions, numbers of habitable rooms, and status of the respondents in terms of educational level, occupation and ownership of any form of mobility. The researchers have equally employed the dual tools of oral interview and photographs as backups to the established facts about the town. Sufficient facts derived from all these were interpolated and interpreted.

The study also integrates the much needed secondary information/ data with other surveys (socio-economic housing conditions and types etc) to arrive at a good conclusion on what exist in the town. This is further buttressed by the area view and external morphology of the housing environment of Ota core physical outlook which was made possible by photographic shots. In addition to this oral interviews were conducted with few selected town Stakeholders.

4. Results and Discussion

With the employment of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), the administered questionnaires (150 in numbers) were easily coded and various variables relationships analyzed. On the types of housing form in the case study research findings show that 81% of the respondents live in Brazilian architectural house type of houses some of which are in fair condition state but they may need maintenance through upgrading. Whereas, 47% of the respondents live in houses which are in a fair state and whose owners belong to a Community Development Association (CDA) in the community. 30% of the study population have a family size of between 5 and 7 persons whose main occupation is business trading predominantly in the informal sector. Further, it was found that 55.0% of respondents depend on water vendors for their domestic water supply which may not be safe and adequate to meet the daily human need for a healthy living.

From the various analyses that depict crucial information about the town physical conditions it is quite revealing that Ota now has a fair share of the Lagos slum. More than 50% of the residents (respondents) affirmed that they could not acquire more than primary education. This trend is in conformity with what obtains in other slums settlement worldwide. From all analyzed variables particularly the Housing type and condition in the town, we can see evidences of poverty in absolute term.

From table 1.0, it appears more clearly that 10 out of 11 civil servants had gone through secondary school with more than 50% of the number possessing post secondary school certificates. Whereas no one person among the businessmen or traders actually possess a post secondary school certificate, majority of the Artisans however stopped at secondary school level of education with just only 16.6% of this category has never gone through any school, that is no formal education. The table reveals that 60% person of the total population of the Respondents took to Business or some forms of petty trading. Also as much as 22% of the respondents have chosen Art as a mean of livelihood. The obvious occupation distribution is considered normal in this kind of environmental set up where majority of the population lives in abject poverty. It was observed during the field survey that most of the business/trading or artistic design takes place in front of the house or within a proximate distant. This similarly confers poverty level hence inability to pay for shop in the commercial core or along a commercial streets within the town itself.

The condition of housing is alarming when measured in density. Occupancy ratio is density expression of people per livable room or habitable room in a dwelling. Such medium is used to determine the suitability of an accommodation. When this is applied it reveals the degree of overcrowdings or space utilization in a building. Most cities in United Kingdom has occupancy ratio between 0.5 and 1.0. Compared with a similar study carried out in Zaria, Sabon- garri (a section of Zaria) has occupancy ratio of between 3 and 4.1 while Zaria indigenous city has 1.7 (Urquhart 1972). Figure of this kind is however very rare in tropical Africa where there is obvious high birth rate and poor housing conditions. This study reveals occupancy ratio of between 4.5 for Ota core area.

From Table 2 there seems to be a moderate congestion in the numbers of people per habitable room. Elsewhere there may be contrary indices. It must be understood that many of the present house owners inherited the house from their fathers and now occupied by one or more inheritors of the same family. In most Yoruba tribe, many enlightened inheritors seldom live in the houses secured through this medium. Civilization has afforded many the opportunities to seek better accommodation outside the old and poor environmental area.

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From the various analyses that depict crucial information about the town physical conditions it is quite revealing that Ota now has a fair share of the Lagos slum. More than 50% of the residents (respondents) affirmed that they could not acquire more than primary education. This trend is in conformity with what obtains in other slums settlement worldwide. As much as 70% of the study populations is married and has their work place located

within the community, some few metres away from their residence. From all analyzed variables particularly the Housing type and condition in the town, we can see evidences of poverty in absolute term. See tables1-10 in their sequence order.

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Table 3 shows the income status of the different jobholders in the study area where majority (more than 90 percent) of the entire respondents earned far above N80, 000 (Nigerian currency) per annum. This is not a strange outcome and expected in a place where businesses thrive without much inhibitions and where tax collecting system is weak and has the tendency of aiding tax evasion. Comparing the relationships that exist between different occupations and annual income of the residents in the area one can observe the keen correlation as it may be imagined. Residents with a formal education are expected to be better off in business and in the acquisition of good jobs. As it is with most informal jobs the common trend here is that the residents maintain a subsistence living, only able to sustain the family members, and not having beyond that. When this trend persists over a period of time, deep poverty and poor conditions of housing environment are inevitable. The inability of the residents to get help from government to assist in the improvement of the environment matters and more especially in the social infrastructure development often lead to frustration and lack of trust in the governance of the local area. Government at all levels must be informed that there is no better way of getting their citizens involved in community development other than through their commitment to the people living environment.

It is manifestly cleared that it is old housing types are most prevalent within Ota core community. Moreover there are clear indications of renovation of aged buildings to guarantee their continuous utility at least within a reasonable future time and to withstand the yearly erosion or flood menace in the area.

The Impacts of the Identified Problems on the Quality of Life were examined according to Table 4 which shows the mean level of quality of life in the study area. Majority of the people who have lived in the Ota town for a duration ranging 1 to 5 years (the largest group of people) feel that the quality of life in the study area is good, and this view is shared by most of the people who have lived in the area for a period of between 11 and 15 years. On the contrary those who have lived there for more than 20 years mostly feel that life is very good in the study area. From all indications, the longer the residents have lived, the poorer the assessment of the area environmental condition. This analysis shows that the vast majority of the respondents feel that there is a lot of room for improvement in the area, so as to upgrade their living conditions.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study can not be concluded without emphasizing the need for a wholesome investment in Nigeria town-wide infrastructure development as a pre-condition for successful and affordable housing environment standard

and as one effective mechanism for reversing the socio-economic exclusion of slum dwellers. In doing this therefore the survey highlights below some possible solution or strategic measures that can be adopted in order to achieve the set goal.

Many of the proffered environmental challenges solution in Ota will remain a mere mirage except there is deliberate institulization of good ideals and governance with the hope to birth practical solutions. The practical approach to attain this is creation of agenda for environmental issues. This may involve prescribing minimum impact, citizens' enlightenment, developing new creative systems to enhance living and for broader solution) and celebrating nature as something of which we are a part. The current administration of the Lagos state government (Nigeria) has engaged this next environmental agenda for the betterment of the mega city of Lagos's economy and the wellbeing of the city's residents.

Whereas the challenge in many Nigerian-towns is a matter of poor improvement on facilities and poor development control, it may sound reasonable that the government at the state level accept the responsibility of upgrading urban environmental condition through a setup scheme. In this regard effort should first geared toward generating city auditing to carry out different shades of environmental condition peculiar to each city in the state. Then proffer the required strategy to tackle such problem.

Going by the revealed information on Ota environmental concern, coupled with a sense of exigency that the present deterioration of the environment in Ota has begun to acerbate, we can now beginning to rethink a holistic solution toward achieving a sustainable and equitable socio-economic development and growth of the ancient town. For the overall benefits of the community, efficiency and effectiveness of the government planning agency, and environmental management for the town, the following principles should apply in guiding Ota housing environment and growth:-

• Realization that the environment forms an integral concern in development management and equally hazards as a result of poor environment threaten development and achievement of anticipated good living conditions.

• That local environmental management requires coordination, implementation and technical support among the diverse community stakeholders

• Worthy of note is that all environmental management and planning must be proactive in adaptation to the existing structure - mechanisms and institutions.

• That environmental management requires deliberate and continuous public awareness and political support

• More importantly that poverty reduction is the key objective to improving the welfare of Ota's residents.

Having considered the environmental issues the following Setting the priorities of the Awori Ota city township may require some combine efforts of institutional Framework and basic urban service provision for Ota Environmental Planning and Management. One of such is the solid waste management, Ota regional market improvement and current environmental pollution from the proximate industrial estates.

The government must have the consciousness that local town Planning and works department alone cannot continue to address environmental issues without the full support of all stakeholders and the residents. In nearly all development schemes, Plan implementation has always been the greatest proposition to be broken, but needful to stretch here that Ota case will not be an exception except for a rethink of effective use of strategy. Any development Programme in Ota town should involve Communities participation (also called bottom-up approach). In other words the idea of recognizing contributions by various actors enhances participatory development.

Few years ago, the Federal government of Nigeria inaugurated a national physical development consortium with the mandate to formulate National physical planning strategies for the country. While this is a commendable step of government there is still need to review governance institutional framework in the country in order to incorporate community structures into the national institutional framework. In the same vein, there is a need to optimize, integrate and coordinate activities of all development agencies within the community to maximize development benefits as earlier emphasized. Since Community development Association in Ota has been firmly rooted and developed, it is the recommendation of this study that all intended Programme processes be absorbed within the working structure of the local authority. This in turns can foster good environmental health and sustainability.

Against the backdrop of African challenges which are traceable to factors related to her historical antecedent, influence of the European through colonization and such matters that are akin to cultural affinity, belief and the cancer of corruption which now constitutes a Hugh and unbreakable barrier to our general transformation.

Findings of this research reveal that it is possible to successfully implement a sustainable environmental scheme or programme through a community and stakeholder participation but such efforts will require more time - because traditions take time to change - than what the programme has planned for: there is a need to be flexible in project time frame.

In most developing countries, control and monitoring of the quality of surface waters used for the production of drinking water are not systematic lack of means. From the scientific point of view, environmental monitoring campaigns produce large amounts of data that are often not easy to interpret (Kowaliski et al, 2006; Felipe-Sotelo, 2007).

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Table 1

Occupation of Respondents versus Educational Level Cross-tabulation.

		Educational Level				
		Primary School	**Secondary School**	**Post Sec. School**	**No formal Education**	**Total**
Occupation Of Respondents	Civil Service	0	4	6	1	11
	Bus/Trading	27	37	12	14	90
	Artisan	10	18	0	6	34
	Driving	1	1	2	0	4
	Others	2	3	6	0	11
	Total	40	63	26	21	150

Source: Authors' field survey, September 2012.

Table 2
Habitable room and Number of persons in the Building.

		Number of persons in the Building					Total
		3-5 pers	6-8 pers	9-11 pers	12-14 pers	15 pers & above	
Numb. of Habitable rooms in building	2-3	12	5	2	4	1	24
	4-5	8	9	4	5	15	41
	6-7	2	3	2	3	7	17
	8-9	0	1	3	3	25	32
	>10	0	0	0	0	35	35
Total		22	18	11	13	83	149

Source: Authors' field survey, September 2012.

Table 3
Occupation versus Annual income of Respondents Cross tabulation.

		Annual income of Respondents in Naira(N)								Total
		1,000 - 15,000	15,001 - 20,000	20,001 - 30,000	30,001 - 40,000	50,001 - 60,000	60,001 - 70,000	70,001 - 80,000	80,001 & Above	
Occupation of Respondents	Civil Service	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	8	11
	Business/ Trading	11	2	3	2	2	2	2	65	89
	Artisan	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	30	34
	Driving	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	3	4
	Others	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	6	10
Total		15	3	3	3	4	3	5	112	148

Source: Authors' field survey, September 2012.

Table 4
Correlation between Number of years of tenacity and Quality of life.

		Quality of Life					
		Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Total
Number of Years as a Resident	1-5	0	16	37	19	3	75
	6-10	3	3	14	21	0	41
	11-15	0	0	8	6	0	14
	16-20	0	3	3	5	0	11

	20-Above	0	1	4	4	0	9
Total		3	23	66	55	3	150

Source: Author's Field Survey 2012.

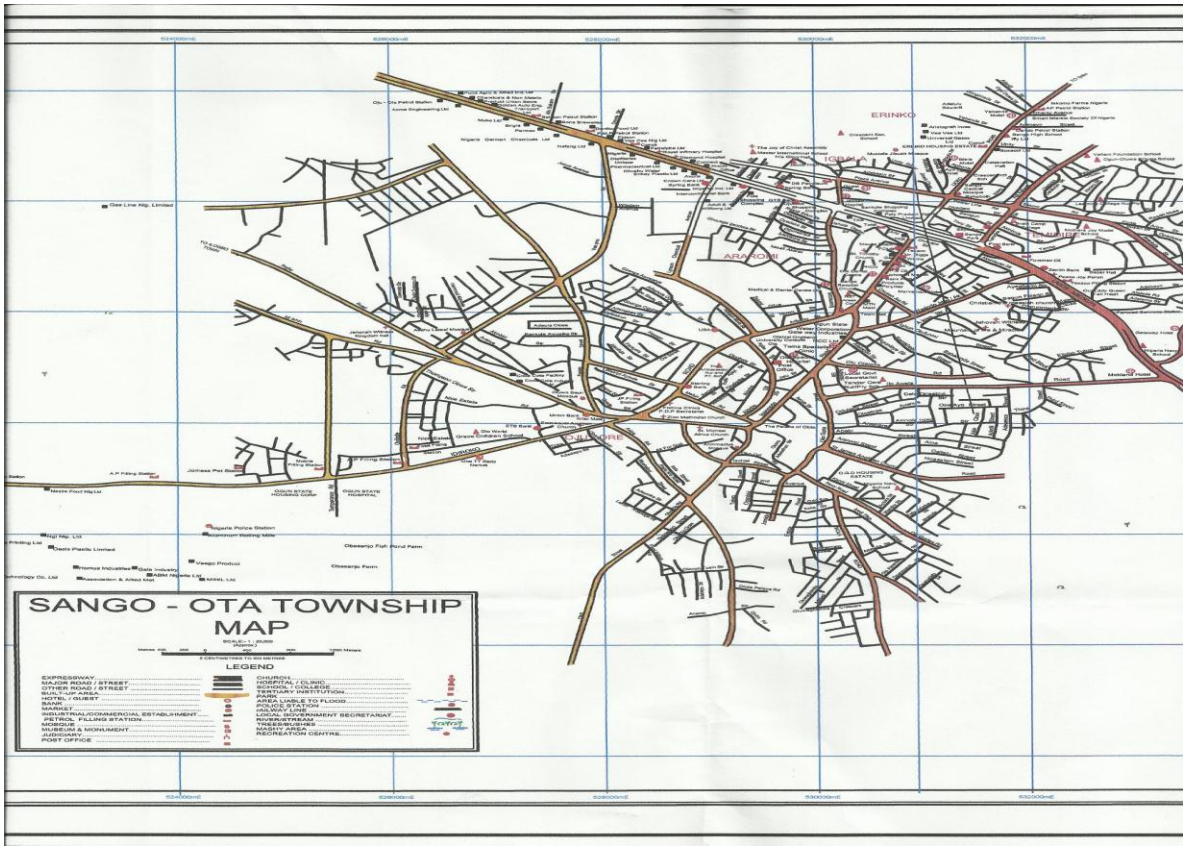

Fig.1.0. Ota Township Street-Map Source: Google map, 2013.