

# PHYSICAL PLANNING AND SUSTAINABLE URBANIZATION IN NIGERIA

**BY**

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## **Abstract**

*This paper examines the processes of urbanization in a developing country like Nigeria vis-à-vis the problems, prospects and opportunities this peculiar process presents. It further highlighted the role of physical planning in urban development; physical development and control; urban management; waste management as in collection, treatment and safe disposal of solid and liquid wastes; social organisation as in the recognition and the inclusion of stakeholders especially the poor; etc, in ensuring sustainable urbanization. These roles; the paper emphasized, can be effectively carried out through public, private and individual interventions in order to restore and further perpetuate the inherent socioeconomic advantages of large agglomeration of people and production processes for urban and national sustainability. The paper strongly recommends the full involvement of experts, the entrenchment of participatory democracy which involves the poor and strengthens revenue generation in effectively addressing issues of urbanization.*

## **Introduction**

Wirth (1938; cited in Carter, 1981) defines urban area as a relatively large, dense and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals. Urbanization which is the process whereby human beings congregate in relatively large number at one particular spot is a universal phenomenon of considerable antiquity (Mabogunje, 1968). The phenomenon of urbanization may have made its appearances as long as 6,000 years ago, probably in Mesopotamia. It is likely that the first sustained agricultural surpluses were the key to what is presently a global phenomenon, when farming no longer require the constant daily works of every able persons in a society there by presenting ample time for other activities (Blij, 1980).

Urban centres emerged as permanent human settlements of relatively large and socially heterogeneous population in which the dominant occupation is non-primary production. Therefore, they are seen as products of increasing economic specialization and

advancing technology. The only way it is possible to advance from a subsistence basis is by specialization of economic activities. The linkages between specializations necessitate the accumulation of people and this is the process of urbanization (Carter, 1981).

In other words; urbanization advances with individuals specializing in one aspect of the economy or the other. Verily this can be seen across major urban centres. What is however lacking is the full fledge support and involvement of these professionals especially physical planners. Their opinions regarding planned or ongoing urban projects and programmes even when sort are hardly adhered to; even though they are about the only ones trained and entrusted with the art and science of urban planning and management. This negation has been long; probably as old as urbanization itself and has not been without serious consequences to the city environment and city dwellers as well. It is only by recognizing and accepting the role of professional planners that we are going to have sustainable urbanization; one that is constructive not destructive, inclusive and democratic- where people congregate for better living and livelihood.

### **Processes and Indicators of Urbanization**

Causes and processes of urbanization are similar across the globe. But a critical look at urban growth and sustenance would reveal that they differ; especially going by the unique and peculiar experiences of the developing countries. While the processes of urbanization seems to have been completed in developed world with over 70% of the population living in urban centres, they appears to be going on in the third world countries. Indeed, the areas of massive contemporary urbanization lie predominantly in the developing parts of the worlds. This is most simply expressed by the gradual southward movement of the mean latitude of the largest cities (Carter, 1981).

Rapid urban growth in developing countries reflects substantial migration to cities from rural areas and also natural population increase (the net effect of births minus deaths)

among city residents. On average, of the two sources of urban population growth, natural increase plays the greater role; with some cities growing two or three times faster than the country's overall population. For example, Dhaka grew in population by an average of nearly 7% per year from 1975 to 2000 compared with an annual average of 2.1% for Bangladesh as a whole. In the same period, the population of Lagos grew at an average of 5.6% per year compared with 3% for Nigeria as a whole (Engelman, 1997, Gelberd, Hayb and Kent, 1999, and United Nations Population Division – UNPD, 2000).

For a settlement to become urban, it has to have certain characteristics that differentiate it from rural areas. These attributes of urban centres include: change in the dominant economic activities of the people, social and behavioural changes, economic and demographic transformations, etc. All these differentiate an urban area from a village or rural settlement in the sense that these factors are more advanced, more organised or highly sublimed in the urban scene. These characteristics of urban centres are universal, but with major differences in developing countries. This is due to high and growing populations, tribal or religious segregation, in what suppose to be a heterogeneous assemblage. As Blij (1980) puts it 'most non-western cities contain a wide variety of ethnic cluster, and these tend to be associated with particular areas of the regions. New migrants to the city will look for the settlement of their own kind and will seek to stay there, no matter how poor the facilities.

**Demographic Transformation;** In the developed world, population rise from low birth and death rates of the pre-industrial revolution through high birth rate and low death rate of the industrial revolution and then stabilized at low birth and death rates of the present post industrial revolution. Demographic transition in African and other developing nations, population rise from low birth and death rates to high birth and death rates and has ever so! In fact the population especially urban population, keep rising at an alarming rate. While medicine has been able to raise and stabilize the populations of the developed countries, it

seems to have forever upshot that of the developing world. In other words, while medicine can claim success in dealing with death it has not been able to control birth in the developing countries. And to make matters worse, rural–urban migration has further encouraged urban population explosion. The streams of people flowing into Nigeria cities from the country side have since become a ‘flood; internal migration trends indicate a nation–wide urbanization rate which at 5.5 per cent in 1996, was roughly twice the national population growth rate of 2.9 per cent.

Records show that over the 30 year period from 1952 the population of most Nigeria’s urban centres increase five fold. Going by current projections, it is believed that by the end of first quarter of the new century, up to 65 per cent or two-third of the total population will be living in cities. Lagos alone will be home to 24 million residents; Okunlola (2001). By far, the leading cause of population growth is natural increase (birth minus death). In the last few years there have been more successful live births, infant mortality has been reduced because of improve medical care and sanitation conditions, medical and health facilities have been improved especially in the major urban centres, and these has brought about a considerable reduction in the general death rate and rise in the life expectancy. However, while general measures in dealing with agents of death have been readily and widely accepted, those that reduce birth rate have been less successful. In other words, over the last 20-year period from 1950–1970 the population of the largest urban centres in Africa has been increasing at a rate over 7 percent a year, while the total population itself is only growing by about 2 to 3 per cent a year. This is threatening not only the prospect of real economic development but also the possibility of stable political evolution, Ajeagbu (1976).

The success of birth control measures would be very much hindered in a society where success or wealth is measured by the number of children a man or family possesses and manual labour is increasingly becoming the only readily available power to till the land. In

both cases how the individual family members fair is less important. Disease epidemics, wars and other natural and man-made disasters are also discouraging many from having small family size.

**Economic Transformation;** Just as food surplus initiated large congregation of people in pre-historic Mesopotamia, Indus valley, Europe and America, so also agricultural wealth of the Sudan grassland/savannah region south of the Sahara has been an important factor in the development of its cities; especially during the medieval period. These grassland areas become the scene of an extensive interregional and international commerce and witnessed the emergence of various kingdoms and empires providing peace and stability necessary for carrying on commerce. Extensive international trade across the desert as well as the complementary interregional trade within the Sudan and between it and the forest areas to the south encouraged the rise of many cities, Mabogunje (1968).

Although agriculture was transformed from subsistence activities to impetus for industry and trade, still; till date this primary economic sector is been practiced by the rural poor using manual labour. And while cities are supposed to be areas of secondary and tertiary economic activities, like manufacturing, trade and services as obtained in the developed world, they are often centres of agricultural practices both urban and peri-urban in the developing world.

**Change in Manufacturing;** While in the industrialized, capitalist world manufacturing was transformed from the use of simple manual implements to complex machines courtesy of the industrial revolution, in Africa and other developing nations; production of goods and services by the traditional industries was instead undermined. ‘...especially during the colonial period, traditional handcrafts were seriously undermined by the effective penetration of cheaper, mass produced substitutes from the factories of Europe. The result was that many traditional textile workers were deprived of their means of livelihood, numerous smithies closed down, soap

makers, leather works, calabash decoration, bead makers and numerous other craftsmen were forced out of their traditional occupation’.

Contrary to expectations, the traditional industries did not die all together; unlike what obtained in the developed countries these industries are still present in our towns and cities. This is because many workers of such industries whose products were affected by the influx of foreign substitutes find solution by engaging in modern equivalent of traditional crafts. That a blacksmith might become a tinker, bicycle repairer or a mechanic; a wood worker could become a carpenter and a weaver might become a tailor. But many remain with their old trade content with its low income but high respect given to them by their clients; while some relocate to the village or nearby rural areas to practice alongside farming; the safest and most certain of opportunities, Mabogunje (1968).

**Infrastructural Transformation;** Urban centres are supposed to be home to manufacturing and services, so apart from heterogeneity they are also citadels of modern infrastructures, social services and utilities. But in the third world urban areas, this is only confirmed to certain parts of the settlement and the larger society is left untouched. Many settlement, were left with no infrastructures at all. This may be a carry-over experience from the colonial masters who prefer to only improve the European quarters. For many years Lagos was the only centre with a pipe water supply. The Lagos water works were completed in 1914 on the Iju River. Onitsha, Aba, Kaduna and Kano had their water schemes completed by 1929. the provision of electricity services followed much the same pattern, Lagos was first lighted by electricity in 1896, the discovery of coal at Udi in 1916 led to the construction in 1923 of a more modern power station having a capacity of 3,000 Kw, almost years later. Blij (1980) rightly described third world urban centres as cities where, most of the people still travel on foot (the bicycle has made in roads, through) or by horse and carts or by camel; houses,

hostels workshops, and other special function buildings are still mixed up, so that it would be difficult and may be impossible to find an urban region such as a downtown.

**Social and Political Chance;** Ressler (1964; cited in Carter, 1981) highlighted features of an urban centre to include ‘the emergence of the middle class measured by per capita income, and the rise of nationalism,... for it supplies the ideology that can command loyalties, motivate action and legitimate the changes to be effected. This is measured by the percentage of literacy among the population over the age of fifteen’. Also important is social and physical distinctiveness of the area or region from its surrounding rural communities. These were well evident in Nigerian cities since pre-colonial period. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, northern Nigerian cities already possessed a high degree of social complexity and physical distinctiveness, setting them apart from purely rural communities the use of clay for house building was the hallmark of urban construction as distinct from the thatch building of the rural areas, Mabogunje (1968).

But in many third world cities the middle class is not often very conspicuous, the people are either rich or poor. Due to high levels of poverty and the subsequently low literacy levels, squalors and slum build by thatch and rags housing the poor can be seen in almost all urban centres of the developing countries be it administrative, economic or industrial capital of the region. As if all these is not enough, third world urban centres are also home to social ethnic and religious conflicts many resulting into large scale mayhem and destruction of properties. Political maturity and true spirit of heterogeneous society is still, to a large extent, lacking in the third world urban dwellers. The Kaduna melee of February and May 2000 and its subsequent reprisal killings in urban centres across the nation, is just one amongst the many similar clashes that occurs across the country almost on annual basis. As a result the government was forced to introduce traditional chieftdoms in a hitherto no-man’s land like

Kaduna; another unfortunate step towards the de-urbanization of our mega cities. Thanks to lack of beneficial social and economic change.

### **Urbanization in Developing Countries**

Urbanization is not a recent development in the developing world, what is however yet to happen in this fast growing process is the full achievement of the essence of coming together. The initial crude and rural methods and processes of production, interaction, behaviour and etiquette are although fast changing to befitting urban standards but unlike in the developed world obstacles are always on the way of these desirable changes. Mabogunje (1971) explained that ‘the primary reason why urbanization represent such a disturbing factor in many African countries today is that it is essentially a consumer–innovation, a new form of social organization which encourages an attitude negating to or at least inconsistent with real economic development. According to Blij (1980) ‘non western city is quite different from that of the western city. In the first place, western cities have a different heritage. They inherited their land–value structure, the high cost CBD from pre-industrial cities second, the western city emerged and was differentiated regionally and specialized functionally on the basis of the distribution and circulation of considerable wealth, wealth that is simply not available in non-western cities and is not likely to be for a long time. These will be reflected in the urban scene. The non western city will be recognizably distinct for a long time to come, and perhaps forever.

Mabogunje (1971) sees more of the faults coming from the colonial masters. The rise and growth of industrial city in Europe was the occasion of significant transformation in the technology of production and transport and in the organization of business and other enterprises. In African, no such fundamental transformation was consequent on the growth of modern city. In short urbanization during the colonial period denied the African not only the opportunity of acquiring modern productive skills but also the chance of learning



organizational skill needed for ensuring the smooth flow and delivery of his produce for foreign markets.

### **Problems of Urbanization in Nigeria**

Urbanization in Nigeria unlike in the developed countries started with physical problems especially the sitting of the towns. The coming of the colonial masters brought in the social and economic aspects and further worsened the whole process of large agglomeration of people for a common good. Urban centres were treated as potential markets for foreign goods by suppressing the production and development of traditionally manufactured goods. This was unlike what obtained in western world (Lampard, 1955).

On housing, structural and infrastructural decadence Mabogunje (1971) writes for as long as the colonial regime lasted the rush to the city was kept under moderate control by the simple expedient of restricting the opportunities available for education and creating conditions which discourage massive migration from rural to urban areas. Such restraints by their very nature are inconsistent with democracy and self-rule. Hence, with the independence of most African countries, the floodgate of migration from rural to urban area seems to have been thrown wide open. This among others brought in urban poverty, growth of slums and squatter settlements, etc.

Physical and environmental restraint to urban planning in Nigeria cities seems to have its roots from the location of these cities. The location which hitherto serves a major point for defence is now the main hurdle on the path of development. For many of the urban centres in this category, defence or refuge consideration led to preference for sites such as hilly areas (Ibadan and zaria), Island, lagoons and low marshy often thickly forested, grounds for instance (Lagos, Epe and Benin respectively) the ground area (of Lagos, for instance) for the spatial expansion of the towns is very restricted particularly because of the increased tempo of urban sprawl in recent years. The land, which is flat and low, is liable to flooding and creates

drainage difficulties (as in Benin city and Lagos ) as well as being in danger of sea water incursion and thus submergence (as in Lagos Victoria island), Ajaegbu (1976).

The second problem of urbanization in Africa is that of organization and management. It would appear that in most African countries modern industrial cities have emerged so rapidly that it has been impossible to develop the appropriate administrative skills to manage them efficiently, Mabogunje (1971). This is worsen by the fact that physical planning has not been given its due role in this process as practiced in more developed countries. As a result, high growth and uncoordinated physical development easily leads to environmental and social problems the city can hardly cope with. Okunlola (2001) writes that unfortunately, the consequences of this highly accelerated process has contributed to a growing inadequacy and general deterioration in housing conditions, widespread poverty, increasingly inefficient and inadequate infrastructure facilities, widespread environment decay arising from the failure of municipal waste management systems and a progressive helplessness on the part of city management to provide solutions to these emerging problems. There are additional economic costs of all these to residents and business alike. Poor infrastructure facilities in Nigeria cities mean household and transporters spend more on self provided maintenances cost for services like electricity generations and water boreholes.

### **Recommendations**

Among the major challenges facing Nigeria in the new millennium is that of transforming its ever-growing number of cities into functional entities that can cope with the rising demands of contemporary urban life. Essentially, this involves devising ways of raising urban infrastructure to functional levels so that less money is spent by the users on maintenance and production costs, getting city residents to develop sense of ownership in their cities through inclusive or participatory democratic practices that ensures social services function efficiently so that residents can readily assess challenges ahead. Provision of better health services that

will enables them become more productive, and harnessing the huge untapped social capital potentials, which exist within the city to attract investments in this age of increasing globalization (Mabogunje, 2005).

It is pertinent to say that African policies should seek inspiration wherever possible, but care must be taken to avoid those that do not tally with local realities, and be weary of constant policy change. It must be emphasised that most of these policies were designed and packaged by those who are not in tune with what operates locally here. This has not been without consequences, as (Mabogunje, 1996) pointed out, ‘three decades of trying to drive the economies of these countries on the basis of outside inspirations and planning have left them prostrate, the people wallowing in deepening poverty and the environment exposed to all forms of pollutions and hazards’.

Cities have to compete to attract international finance and foreign direct investment. They are more effective in this regards when they provide very congenial working and investment environment for the agents of national and international capital. The main hindrance to this is not just the urban poor but also municipal authorities or local governments. To live up to all of their responsibilities, municipal authorities are expected to mobilize ample financial resources. This can only come from the people and the avenues they suggest and recommend in a participatory decision making process—a free democratic setting that encourages paying of taxes and further ensures accountability so that those representatives can provide us with the services we desire. This would ensure that our cities became a beautiful, healthy, safe and economically stimulating home for all (Mabogunje, 1999).

## **Conclusion**

Urbanisation is not a destructive process, rather; it presents varied opportunities for the advancement of the people. City economy can become more sustainable if it uses the

opportunities the challenges of rapid urbanization presents. For example; if well planned and managed discarded materials forming mountains of heaps in urban areas could become an indispensable source of income and livelihoods for thousands in the cities. Urban poverty can be well addressed through local inventory and assistance. For example; urban farming can help feed city residents. It is estimated that about 800 million urban and peri-urban farmers produce over 15 per cent of world's food. Until the mid 1990s, when massive population growth and rising demand overwhelmed local food supplies, urban farmers in China's 18 largest cities were able to produce over 90% of locally consumed vegetables and half of all the meat and poultry. Hong Kong still produces two-thirds of the poultry, half of the vegetables, and 40% of fish it consumes. Singapore produces all of its meat and fish and one-quarter of its vegetables. If city governments adopted explicit policies and incentives to encourage urban agriculture, the number of urban farmers would likely increase substantially (O'Meara, 1999, United Nations Population Fund – UNPF, 1991).

For efficient and effective urbanization, emphasis should be placed on the involvement of experts and the provision of guidelines. Experienced city planners and administrators works with city or urban master plans which guides development and also specifies sustainable sources of funding these urban projects. This is in addition to a general call on citizens to aptly face their civil responsibilities as urban dwellers, especially through the payment of taxes, fees and charges to enable city administrators perform their duties effectively.

Democratic dispensations encouraging participatory urban governance and collective decision making process has been shown to be an effective strategy for tackling the problems of urban poverty. This is because it ensures equity, strengthens local participation and accountability on the part of all especially the urban authorities. Equity is highest where there is greatest investment in democracy. Equitable associations tend to pay attention to

transparency over cost and benefits. Most of them also have in place sanctions for free riders or those who break their rules, and clear procedures for resolving conflicts, Macqueen, Bose, Bukula, Kazoora, Ousman, Porro and Weyerhaeuser (2006). The main problems that are facing the urban poor—lack of secure tenure and basic infrastructure including water and sanitation, low incomes from formal and informal labour markets, and exclusion and the continuous exposure to the detrimental effects of anti-poor programmes; are issues that can be tackled effectively (Mitlin, 2006:13). This is more effective with the full involvement of all stakeholders contrary to the insistence of a group or individuals as is often the case in most developing countries. This would create individuals with high sense of pride about their settlement - City Fathers as referred to by Mabogunje (1999). That is, individual who are not in politics but who are greatly committed to the orderly development and progress of the city. The presence of these individuals in a city helps to ensure that other citizens are mobilized and organized to see the city not just as a place to earn a living but also a centre that commands their loyalty and dedication. Furthermore, underinvestment in the rural area can be economically disastrous for cities themselves it is often the rural sector which provide the economic base sustaining the cities, the main resources needed for urban development, the material for the dominant industrial activity, and the food sustaining, not only the rural, but; the urban population as well, (El-Shekhs, 1974).

Democracy should be practical and all inclusive; providing for the necessary infrastructures for living and livelihood in both rural and urban scenes. As Satterthwaite (2005) puts it, 'If most citizens have their physical needs met and their rights protected – as in high income nations – they are more likely to be content with representative democracy. They are content as long as provision for these is adequate, bills are not too high and there are complaints procedures they can use'.

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