

SLUMS: HUBS OF OPPORTUNITIES AND SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

BY

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Abstract

This paper discusses the characteristics of urban slums and that of their inhabitants. Using Minna urban environment; a survey of two major slums; Kpakungu and Barikin-Saleh was carried out with the aim of highlighting living conditions and how policy change can provide needed opportunities to for a better life. Using water provision and waste management, the field study revealed that these slum inhabitants pay more by buying water from vendors and engaging the services of informal providers as the alternative sources. The paper submits that these areas and their residents are given a pejorative tag not because they are populated by the low- income group; but rather, because of service providers' refusal to adequately invest in them: which is not for the fear of the inability of slum inhabitants to pay, but because of their incapacity to serve all city residents. Since slums are fast becoming the major areas of our urban environment, and those living there are capable of paying for these amenities; full investment in them by both public and private bodies is recommended.

Introduction

It is stated that over 70 percent of sub-Saharan Africans, especially Nigerians, who live in urban areas reside in slums (UN-Habitat, 2005; cited in Falade, 2006:9). This presents a disturbing situation not only to city managers but most importantly to city planners. This is because the issue raises a lot of serious questions that demand objective response for immediate remedies that would have long-term and sustainable solutions. Top among the challenges of slums is the need to define clearly what they are by understanding their characteristics, the history of their formation, their threats and opportunities, as well as the management challenges posed by the majority of slum dwellers.

A slum is seen as a very poor and crowded area, especially of a city, where houses are in an extremely bad state and the living conditions are very low (Cambridge, 2002:1356). Falade (2006:6) is more specific in defining slums as 'residential areas that lack adequate access to water and sanitation, security of tenure, poor structural quality of housing and insufficient living area'. This popular definition gives a picture of a place that is mainly inhabited by the very poor,

who cannot afford to live in decent housing environment. However, there are various reasons that make people remain where they reside. Accessibility and closeness to place of work or main activity area, closeness to kit and kin, etc; are usually among the first reasons given by urban dwellers. Hence in many cities in Nigeria, large proportions of residents of the areas regarded as slums do not portray the attributes of those who lack adequate income or material possession to earn better living.

Urban analysts often judge people by external quality of their residence; rarely do they look into the resident's social and material possessions, earnings, expenditures and aspirations. This incomplete analysis of the majority of Nigerian urban dwellers is among the reasons that have prompted present definitions and less regard to where the urban poor live. Adequate assessment of slums and informal settlements especially those that include their socio-economic characteristics and aspirations would give much insight for hope for both the residents and needed investment in basic urban infrastructure and services that are currently lacking in the areas and which is the source of wrong signal to many assessors.

This study therefore aims at x-raying the slum characteristics, activities as well as the survival strategies of urban slum dwellers in Minna with the objective of seeking ways to alleviate their plight. This is done through an assessment of the provision of infrastructure necessary for urban living with particular emphasis on water and waste management in poor urban areas. These two are important because of their indispensable role in ensuring good health and adequate sanitation for people and the environment in which they live. Particular concern to this assessment is an highlight on the viability of investments in these parts of the poor urban environment. This is itself warranted because of the high price residents pay informal providers for services and products whose source, safety or state of hygiene they are not sure of.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this investigation is to highlight the characteristics of slums with the view to identifying the social, cultural and economic factors that would promote sustainable investment in infrastructure in these rapidly enlarging sectors of our urban landscapes.

Evolution and Characteristics of Slums

Assessments has shown that in the present developed world where slums first appeared in the 1820s, the word has been used to identify the poorest quality housing, and the most unsanitary conditions; a refuge for marginal activities including crime, 'vice' and drug abuse; a likely source for many epidemics that ravaged urban areas; a place apart from all that was decent and wholesome. In the developing countries, today, slum simply refers to lower quality or informal housing; low-income settlements and poor human living conditions, a heavily populated urban area characterised by substandard housing and squalor (UN-Habitat, 2007b).

Whichever definition is adopted, slum areas have buildings that vary from the simplest shack to permanent and sometimes surprisingly well-maintained structures; and combines to various extents, inadequate access to sanitation and other infrastructures; poor structural quality of housing; overcrowding; and insecure residential status. An important aspect of slums is the forces behind their origin or formation. Various reasons has been given for this ranging from rapid rural-urban migration, urban poverty, inequality to growing worldwide trade and industrialization simply referred to as globalization. The immigrant urban poor have largely moved from the countryside to the cities voluntary, in order to exploit actual or perceived economic opportunities. The rapidity and enormous volume of this rural-urban migration intensifies slum formation. Hence city planning and management systems are unable to adequately cope with the intensive population influx (UN-Habitat, 2007b). The global economic system was responsible for creating the famous slum areas of major cities in today's developed world and it is very likely to do the same again in the developing world. At present, and in particular, global economic booms and busts that ratchet up inequality and distribute new wealth unevenly contribute to the enormous growth of slums. This high growth would inflate the population of slum dwellers to about two 2 billion by 2030, about twice their present number. By then Africa will cease to be a rural continent as more than half of its population will be in cities and towns ((UN-Habitat, 2007a, UN-Habitat, 2007b).

Types of Slum

Slums in the traditional sense are housing areas that were respectable – even desirable – but which deteriorated after the original dwellers moved on to new and better housing in outer parts

of the city. The condition of the old homes declined as they were progressively subdivided and rented out to lower income people. Today however, slums have come to include the vast informal settlements that are quickly becoming the most visible manifestation of urban poverty in the cities of developing countries (Badiane, 2006; UN–Habitat, 2007b). It is in this vast majority that two categories of slums is given as slums of hope and slums of despair. However, it appears that all began with hope but has a high tendency of drifting into despair.

According to (UN – Habitat, 2007b) slums of hope are those on upward trend, largely made up of newer, usually self – built structures, and are in or have recently been through a process of development, consolidation and improvement. Slums of despair appears to be the opposite of slums of hope with declining neighbourhoods in which environmental conditions and services are in a process of seemingly inevitable decay. Unfortunately, the history of slums in Europe, North America and Australia has demonstrated that, without appropriate interventions, slums of hope can all too easily become slums of despair, a self–reinforcing condition that can continue for a very long time.

It is pertinent to identify these appropriate interventions to avoid hopes drifting into despair; a seeming avoidable process, especially if the correct steps are followed that are based on inherent local characteristics and the general initiatives of these slum dwellers. But first, it must be recognized that slums are not areas of risk essentially. Services and infrastructure that are essential in any urban settlement are also required there. Government should spear head approaches to supply basic urban amenities into these areas and should ensure effective monitoring. Poor provision and especially unsupervised procurement by service providers like water vendors portends high risk of infection and disease epidemic. Any attempt to find cost-effective solutions to this problem must consider not only the direct but also the indirect costs of poor provision – and not only the immediate but also the long-term outcomes of its absence. But certainly such investment, according to Bartlett (2003:69-701) cannot be considered an extravagance or going into a drain pipe but, rather, an essential means of ensuring long-term development.

The reason for government negligence of these areas is not far fetched. Mabogunje (2005:4) observed that in the last quarter of the last century many African countries have had to submit to the structural adjustment programme promoted by the Bretton woods institution as the only way to restore their economies back to health. The operation of the programme has meant the cutting down on many social services and (even) the retrenchment of many workers. This has pushed many marginal urban workers (and areas) into poverty (and severe deprivation) characteristics of slum and squatter settlements. According to Toulmin (2005: IX) unless we learn from the past and find ways to build on the success stoner of the present, we risk repeating the many and multiple failures with which the development landscape is scattered.

Concern for Slums

The population of developing countries is growing at alarming rates and the necessary provisions or planning for them (where they exist) is far below demand. It is observed that annual urban growth rates are highest in sub-Saharan Africa (4.58 per cent), followed by western Asia (2.96 per cent), southern Asia (2.89 per cent) and Northern Africa (2.48 per cent). The developed world's cities that have the wherewithal to cater for more than twice their present populations are however growing at a slower pace, averaging 0.75 percent a year. Asia and Africa will continue to dominate global urban growth through 2030. In fact, if urban India was to be considered a separate country then it would be the fourth largest country in the world. (World Bank, 2004; Bharat & Chawla, 2005: 3; Badiane, 2006:6).

These characteristics warrant objective analysis and cross examination of situations in the burgeoning cities of developing countries. This would do more service to the dignity of these cities themselves and to their slum and suburban areas. As Badiane (2006:9) argues that 'these compounds (the slum enclave of cities) are called peri-urban but in reality it is the city proper that is the periphery. Hence, there is no doubt that there is more and more need to study and to learn to know better the form and the significance of the true African cities'. The call is for the study of over 70 per cent Nigerian urban dwellers is and should always be aimed at improving their living conditions not just to highlight their plight and deprivations. It should be objective and clearly define areas where policy implementation would make major impact.

This work highlights a number of basic urban services and infrastructure lacking adequate provision but is necessary for life in the city. This is particularly done to establish residents' survival strategies in coping with the deficiency and to suggest avenues and opportunities that are calling for more investment. This would give a clear road map for urban authorities that are out to improve slums - a necessary agenda for all governments as contained in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Methodology

Through Reconnaissance survey, Kpakungu and Barikin Sale wards of Minna were chosen as sample areas because they both manifest characteristics of slums. As recorded by Owoyele (2006) they have poor physical infrastructure status, unorganised spatial structures, lack of access to basic services such as water, sanitation, waste removal, health services. Others are overcrowding, unemployment, high mortality rate and insecure tenure. A total of 1,200 questionnaires; representing 5.25% of 22,838 residents in the area were randomly administered in the two neighbourhoods. Socio- economic data obtained include types of infrastructure available, who is providing them and at what cost? Others include; problems of accessibility, reliability and efficiency of services, etc. Data collected from them were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics.

Data Analysis

Water Provision

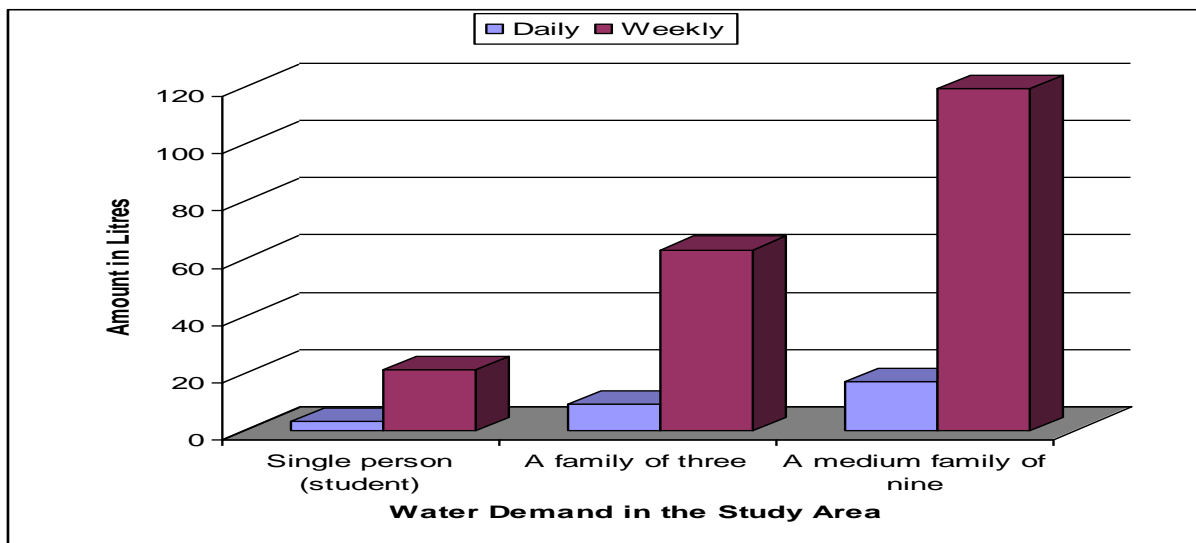
Water is a key urban service and the residents of the study area use it; and even those with inadequate provision require it for survival. Field survey was conducted to find out the quantity required by households in the study area and how they are obtained.

Table 1: Water Provision

Daily Quantity required (litres)	%	Frequency of tap water supply	%
40 – 80	13	Once - twice a day	16
81 - 100	5	Once – twice a week	21
101 – 120	4	Three – five times a week	32
More than 120	78	Not supplied	31
Total	100	Total	100

Source: Field Survey, Nov 2006

Table 1, shows that households in the study area use at least 40 litres of water per day; and over 80 per cent use at least 120 litres each day. Whereas tap water supplied by the municipal authorities through the Niger State Water Board (the municipal authority licensed supplier of piped water in the metropolis) is only regular on daily basis in just 16 per cent of these households and about twice this figure are not opportune to have it at all. This shows that the majority of residents (over 80 percent) are not dependent on municipal water and have to source for both drinking and domestic water elsewhere. This situation increases cost of living. Infrequent or irregular supply of water is forcing many to buy from water vendors at high cost of at least N10 for every ten litres of water. Figure 1 shows the average additional amount of water the respondents use daily and weekly. With the cost of a ten-litre jerry-can of water ranging from N10 to N50 from rainy season through dry season when most shallow wells are dry. This means that a single individual spends at least an additional N210 weekly on water while a family could spend between N630 and N1,190 every week! This is quite above N500 flat rate households pay the State Water Board every month.



Source: Field Survey, Nov 2006

Fig. 1: Additional number of Jerry cans (10 Litres) of water used by respondents

Waste Collection and Disposal

Waste, especially Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) is a product of human activities either at home, office or in the factory. In cities, the collection and especially the safe disposal of waste have

cost implications and it applies to all areas of the metropolis including slums. The field survey revealed that there are both the public and private/individual waste collectors all charging different prices for their services in the area surveyed. Survey findings are far from regarding slum dwellers as incapable to pay for this essential service or are paying the least price for both collection and non-collection. Rather, it was found that the state does not patronize these areas and as such people pay more for the service provided by private waste collectors; and in places where these people cannot reach or are not served by these informal private collectors, uncollected solid waste especially regularly dot open spaces and the entire landscape further posing a serious health concern to all residents especially children that are always playing at the dump sites.

The field surveys also revealed that the fee charged by service providers depend on the provider, the nature and quantity of the waste itself. For solid wastes, cart operators charge between N10-N50 per household waste (usually using twenty-litre containers) collected and disposed. From tables 2 and 3, about 45 per cent of residents pay N20 and another 20 percent pay between N30 and N40 to waste collectors for collection and disposal of their waste. This has a mean of N21.3. With households disposing waste at least thrice in a week, it shows that home owners in these slums could be spending between N240-N480 monthly (N255.60 on the average) on waste disposal alone! This is besides unhealthy and illegal dumping of most of these wastes into drainage channels like rivers and waterways as well as and open lands, causing serious health and environmental concern.

Table 2: Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) Collection and Disposal

Frequency of waste disposal	%
Daily	19
Once a week	24
Twice a week	28
Thrice a week	28
Four times a week	1
Mean X = 3.01	
Total	100

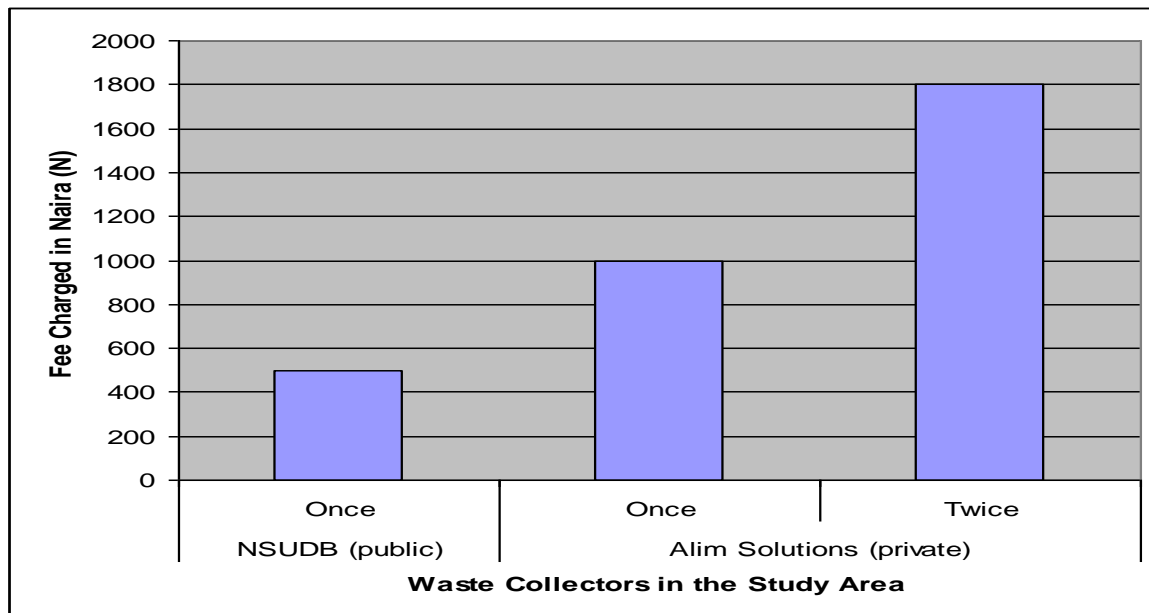
Source: Field Survey, Nov 2006

Table 3: Cost of Waste Collection and Disposal

Cost of each collection (N)	%
10	29
20	45
30	16
40	4
50 and above	6
Mean X = 21.3	
Total	100

Source: Field Survey, Nov 2006

Clearly the data reveals that most residents of the study area are not served by the state’s waste management agency: Niger State Urban Development Board (NSUDB); some residents of the metropolis however, engage the services of certified private waste collectors who charge higher fees than the public agency, which in some cases does not charge any fee in certain areas of the metropolis (See figure 2).



Source: Field Survey, Nov 2006

Fig. 2: Fee Charged by Formal Waste Management Agencies

Housing Provision

Living in a slum does not mean that one cannot afford good accommodation. The survey revealed that there is good quality housing and residential accommodation in the slum areas too and households pay average rents that go as high as N60, 000 per annum (see table 4).

Journal of Environmental Studies, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Environ 2008, 2 (9), 51 – 61.

Table 4: Rent Charged

Amount (N'000)	%
5 – 15	34
16 – 25	23
26 – 35	8
36 – 45	33
More than 45	2
Total	100

Source: Field Survey, Nov 2006

Slum dwellers are able to afford this accommodation despite the cost because as field the survey revealed, many of them have gainful employment, regular, sustainable and dependable sources of income. In fact many residents are civil servants working with either state or federal government and there are many in reputable private organizations that receive higher wages. Figure 3 portrays income level of residents who can pay for basic urban services. It can be seen that over 55 percent earn quite above N11, 000 monthly which is almost twice the minimum wage of the state. The areas are not impoverished neighbourhoods with low capacity to make payments for urban services.



Source: Field Survey, Nov 2006

Fig. 3: Respondents' Monthly Income

Summary of Findings

These tables show among other features that slum dwellers are not staying in free or cheap accommodation. Yet, slums are seen as liabilities rather than assets or more appropriately gold mines of opportunities for investments and urban sustainability. This is usually seen by the manner many official policies and documents including master plans handle the case of slums as that cannot adequately reward any investment. The surveys has found out that slum dwellers need the same infrastructure as any other city dweller, and they are ready to pay and are even paying more than others. This was also found to be the case elsewhere; Argo and Laquian, (2004:6) writing on privatization of water in Jakarta and Manila cited in Hassan (2002) reported that ‘often, the poor have to buy water from vendors or are driven to illegally tapping municipal water trunk lines to get water’. This practice is not without serious implications, as ‘because of these and other reasons, the urban poor have paradoxically paid more for water and sanitation (ranging from 10 to 25 times) compared to rich people with water piped directly into their homes’. This is also reflected in the study area; for example; the Niger State Water Board charges N500 per month per household; whereas slum dwellers spend up to N1,200 weekly to buy water from vendors selling a commodity whose source or state of hygiene they are not sure of; and another N255 monthly on waste collection and disposal apart from other services that are indispensable to healthy living.

This is the case with virtually all infrastructure in the study area. People improvised to supplement public provision; even though the same city authority provides the amenities to other parts of the metropolis at subsidized rates; and in the process pay exorbitant rates sometimes to unscrupulous service providers. That is, this is the situation with power generation, educational services, health care services, civil defence and security services, etc. Assessments have shown that city authorities usually hide their inefficiency at providing these services to the entire metropolis by assuming that slum dwellers are poor and cannot afford to pay or because the areas are unplanned they are outside the jurisdiction of formal planning authorities and the utility agencies. But these are necessary, in fact indispensable amenities; and with their experience of paying exorbitant fees to private operators, the coming of government or any efficient formal operator/provider with better services would be highly welcome.

Furthermore, collective payment as demonstrated by residents of compound/roomy accommodation/housing that are rampant in these areas; is serving as an assurance to would-be investors in the much needed infrastructure in these areas. Although, people in the slums earn low incomes; when put together, they can support the adequate provision of infrastructure and amenities necessary for urban living and livelihood. This is an avenue for government to encourage investors. As observed by Miller (2003:56), and Takezhanov, (2002); the city especially the teaming urban slums are areas to invest in by any serious investors. It would be fine if new owners of enterprises were attracted there; even those trying-out new product/services; for even the expenditures incurred in the process or that are linked to industrial test can be referred to expenditures of future years and guarantee the return of spent means.

Conclusion

According to Badiane (2006:11) one of the manifestations of the failure of many African cities is the dilapidated state and unreliability of their physical infrastructure. Of particular concern in many cities are the poor state of roads, some of which become impassable during the rainy season, as well as the unreliability of water and electricity supplies. In most cities, it is not only a question of state of repair and reliability, but very low levels of access to infrastructure and services by the urban population, especially the poor. The worst problem is sanitation, and the pattern seems to be the same in all cities of developing countries.

Slum areas, peri-urban enclaves and squatter settlements are realities of today's burgeoning developing world cities. The slum settlements of Minna studied lack basic urban services not because the residents cannot afford; but due to increasing marginalisation by the municipal authorities and other service providers who summarily consider them as unplanned areas mainly occupied by those too poor to adequately pay for basic services and infrastructure and have thus refused to extend services to these increasingly popular sectors of the metropolis. That leaves them at the mercy of private/informal providers. If these agencies were to extend services to these areas, or regulate and monitor whoever is to do so; there would not be areas without facilities or infrastructures to have a pejorative tag of a slum.

Recommendations

It should be noted that urban dwellers need the same facilities for decent living and dignified livelihood; but the incessant, erratic or inadequate provision of these infrastructure is what has rendered many urban neighbourhoods an eye-sore today. However, some of these facilities are far beyond what the communities can provide for themselves; due to cost implications, policy regulations and man power requirements; but, this does not mean that they cannot maintain them in the manner of paying adequately for services provided. In fact there are some in the past; like electricity power, that the law forbids them to venture into by being given the responsibility to produce and transmit energy to a public owned electricity company – National Electric Power Authority. Governments at both national and local levels, need to encourage a broad and dynamic concept of entrepreneurship to stimulate personal initiative and initiatives in a variety of organizations that include but reach beyond, the private sector; small and large scale enterprises, social entrepreneurs, cooperatives the public sector, the trade union movement and youth organizations, etc.

One key recommendation for the improvement of lives of slum dwellers is the establishment of pro-poor initiatives to solve their problems and deprivations. This can be achieved through a well organized informal sector especially one with the residents among stakeholders. As (Macharia, 1994:168 cited in Sommers, 2003:38) pointed out that ‘despite the lack of state support for the informal sector in, most African countries, the sector has its own ways of keeping dynamic. The informal sector’s resilience can be so great that support systems arising from social networks, kingship, ethnic (networks) and friendship may keep an informal sector economy thriving (even) when the state system is harassing it’.

Apart from coordinated approach to fighting these urban problems, government policy need to change in approach to urban issues especially pertaining areas of the low-income groups. The government needs to take interest in them and invest in present and potential opportunities there. Slum residents may be earning meagre income but with collective payments and the sharing of responsibilities, they can support any investment in infrastructure to serve them. This is the basic policy adjustment of the century. In the information age, social development is both a condition for and a result of a knowledge based model for economic growth, technological renewal,

ecological sustainability and interpersonal solidarity. The obstacles to the implementation of such a model are not objective but subjective, not tangible but mental. A planning model will become what it is made into, and just like all tools, it is dependant on the know-how, interest and willingness of the user (Soderlind, 2006:15).

The slums and areas occupied by the low-income earners could receive the attention of the authorities, investors and policy makers. Apart from showing willingness to pay for services provided, field research has shown that these groups are already paying far and above what they would be paying if serviced by public and controlled commercial sectors and operators in this area that provide urban infrastructure and services.

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