

Challenges of the Urban Sector in Nigeria: The Way Forward

Oloyede, S.A*, Ayedun, C.A.*, Oni, A.S.* and Ibisola, A.S.**

*Department of Estate Management, School of Environmental Sciences, College of Science and Technology, Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria

**Department of Estate Management, Moshood Abiola Polytechnic, Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria

Abstract

The study ascertains the enormity of research works on the `challenges of the urban sector in Nigeria over the years with a view to identifying grey areas where urgent steps need to be taken as a panacea towards improving environmental standards within the urban setting. The study relied on extensive review of earlier studies on the urban sector across the globe. The study found that contemporary strategies adopted to provide appropriate and affordable housing, portable water supply, energy, transportation, security, sewage disposal, drainages for the urban populace are fairly similar revolving around the establishment of national and city-based housing policies and targets and the creation of specialized agencies to handle urban housing tasks. The study concludes that while there are a few signs of progress, the enormity of efforts of governments, at all levels, to address the myriad of challenges of the urban dwellers in Nigeria is simply overwhelming.

Key words: urban sector, challenges, Way forward, Nigeria

Introduction

Majority of people in Nigeria live in cities where a greater portion of the generated resources of the State is consumed. Despite the huge expenditure by State governments to sustain the urban sectors, they still struggle with enormous human growth rates and immigration in addition to opposite challenges of negative growth since many old industries had closed down or relocated to neighbouring countries as a result of continuous epileptic power supply leading to high production costs, corruption from high places and insecurity from the area boys. A closer look at various urban center settings has shown glaring urban inequality and class segregation across income levels. The traditional setting of general collective living across residential neighbourhoods before Nigeria got her independence in 1960 has given way to residential segregation and subsequently unsustainable residential neighbourhood developments through the introduction of low, medium and high-income residential estates, on the one part and the massive introduction of imported building materials, the cost of which has sidelined the poor within the society. Through the land zoning approach of Federal and State governments, cities and towns compete with each other trying to woo investors who can afford to acquire large tracks of land around the fringes of such cities or towns.

Literature Review on Urban Challenges

Ibem, Anosike and Azuh (2011) investigated the contextual and organizational challenges in public housing provision in Nigeria in the post-independence era using data derived from a survey of fifteen public housing agencies in southern Nigeria. They found that scarcity of housing finance, lack of consistency and continuity in housing policy formulation and poor implementation strategies, unfavorable political environment and declining population of tradesmen in the construction industry were key contextual challenges militating against public housing provision. In addition, low level of inter-agencies collaborations, poor staff motivation and rewarding system as well as inadequate operational equipment and vehicles were responsible for the inability of public housing agencies to deliver on their housing mandate. The paper recommended that stable polity, consistency in housing policies and programs and capacity building in public housing agencies through public-private partnerships are needed to improve on the quantity and quality of public housing in Nigeria.

Adah and Abok (2013) identified the challenges facing water management in Nigeria to include lack of effective compliance to policies, weak data base, fragmented responsibility, climate change, poor state of infrastructure, cost intensive, corruption, rapid urbanization, and low rate of costs recovery as the bulk of available water supply is unmetered and where metered, ridiculously low rates are charged, the relevant data for the study were

sourced from Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources (FMAWR), UN-Habitat publications, Water Aid, and other relevant paper presentations. The statistics from these sources formed core sources of statistical information. Recommendations were made as the way forward to achieving sustainable water management. There is need for total compliance to water management policies (both local and international), encourage stakeholder participation, enforcement of existing laws and regulatory responsibilities. There is also a great need for management policy that aims at financial viability and economic efficiency. More realistic water rates should be charged in order to raise the much-needed revenue to meet increasing production and distribution costs.

Maren, Agontu and Mangai (2013) underscored the dangers of solely depending on oil and gas as the source of energy to every sector of the economy despite the enormous renewable energy potentials in the nation. It also highlights the need for the nation to diversify its energy supply for power stability and energy security as any major breakdown in the sector will result to economic stalemate. It suggests an implementable policy framework that will add renewable energy technology which is clean and sustainable to the nation's energy sector. The study recommended energy availability, accessibility and utilisation has remained inadequate and inefficient as occasioned by the epileptic power supply, constant queues in our filling stations and the folding up of industries in the nation to neighboring African countries due to insufficient power supply resulting to unemployment.

Obadan (1996) noted that the poverty level in Nigeria contradicts the country's immense wealth. Among other things, the country is enormously endowed with human, agricultural, petroleum, gas, and large untapped solid mineral resources. The increasing incidence of poverty, both within and among locations, was in spite of various resources and efforts exerted on poverty-related

programmes and schemes in the country, thus suggesting that the programmes and schemes were ineffective and ineffectual the need for an agreed poverty reduction agenda that can be used by all stakeholders need for strong political commitment to the poverty reduction goal, as well as a depoliticisation of poverty alleviation programmes and projects that corruption and other sharp practices at any stage of the programme are not condoned but severely punished Corruption is generally acknowledged as having adversely affected previous poverty alleviation efforts in Nigeria.

Officha, Onwumesi and Akanwa (2012) reviewed literature on the value of open spaces and the challenges associated with managing these resources and felt that there was need to establish open spaces and recreational centers in Nigerian cities, since, they have a marked effect on many aspects of the quality of the urban environment and the richness of life in a city. They recommended that open spaces should be made an integral component of the environment by the design of well landscaped and managed parks and recreational areas. This, they concluded, could eventually contribute to the quality of life and well-being.

Olayiwola and Adedokun (2014) examined the dimension and magnitude of the housing problems in Nigeria. It examined the causes of the housing problems and suggested ameliorative measures that could serve as the way forward to resolving the housing problems in Nigeria. The paper asserted that certain factors of housing production (land, finance, low housing investment institutional control and corruption) are the main causes of the housing problems in Nigeria. The paper suggested some strategies for solving the housing problems in Nigeria by arguing for a review of the 1978 land use Act, increased production of building materials, procurement of up to date housing data among others, as ways for ensuring sustainable and adequate housing provision in Nigeria.

Uma, Eboh and Obidike (2013) studied the need to regulate internal and external migration which is conceived to be relevant in the development of Nigeria. The authors have the conviction that adequate control measures of migration within and outside the country will play great role in changing the imbalanced development of the country. It was an expository approach which noted that, because the rural areas in Nigeria are devoid of essentials of living such as pipe born water, well equipped health centers, electricity, and industries, the inhabitants seek solace in the urban areas. Besides, the study also showed that the country has really lost a large proportion of her brightest of minds due to unfavourable environmental situation, poor conditions of service, poor remuneration, lack of infrastructure, insecurity of lives and property, among others. On this note, among the suggestions made as a way out are as follows: the law makers should enact laws that will regulate the external migration of professionals whose roles are highly needed in the country; suitable industries for various rural areas in Nigeria are needed at this moment, that is, agro-industries and integrated agriculture are needed in our rural areas so as to fully engage rural dwellers; social amenities/infrastructure such as good road network, electricity, pipe borne water, equipped health centers, recreation facilities, among others should be urgently addressed.

Olayiwola, Adeleye and Ogunsakin (2005) examined the urban housing problem and responses in Nigeria. The paper explores the fundamental root cause of the housing problem in Nigeria. The past and contemporary official responses to the urban housing questions asserts that previous responses to the housing problems had failed in Nigeria largely due to institutionalized mechanisms of decision making and implementation process They lack

the necessary capital, organisational and practical experiences, economic foresights and interests, as well as the moral obligations and class political awareness needed in housing intervention. Organized state intervention is viable. The closer the solutions are to the prevailing national realities the more positive the result would be.

Ademiluyi (2010) attempted to show an overview of the housing delivery strategy taken by government in Nigeria over the years, revealing that Nigeria's impressive housing policies and programs are rarely implemented or haphazardly implemented. The housing delivery strategy in the country is, therefore, a classical example of politics of many words, but little action. The paper suggests that urgent steps need to be taken to bring about the much needed improvement and transformation in the Nigerian housing sector. It also advises the government to back up its many lofty initiatives and efforts with necessary political will and commitment, using cooperatives, development agents, and partnerships through Public Private Sector Participation (PPP). At least five powerful factors involved in the housing crisis and which are, no doubt, beyond an individual's control, namely, population growth, rapid urbanization, natural disasters, political upheaval, and persistent poverty.

Hernando (2003) observed a general outcry on the persistent rise in the unemployment rate in Nigeria which has led an army of angry and desperate unemployed youths prowling cities and the unending influx of youth into the urban areas which has now posed further threat to an already precarious state of national security. Ishola (2008) noted that unemployment as one of the macroeconomic problems could be reduced through the informal sector participation provided it is well supported and managed. More so, Olubukola (2013) stated that the rapid rise in the country's unemployment rate has become a major source of concern. Attah, Audu and Haruna (2013) explored the role of the informal sector as a strategy for reducing unemployment in Nigeria, especially in Kogi State. The study recommended that government at all levels should encourage both employers and employees in the informal sector through funding and infrastructural facilities should be provided to reduce cost of doing business in recommends that government at all levels should encourage both employers and employees in the informal sector

through funding and infrastructural facilities should be provided to reduce cost of doing business in Nigeria. In addition, the study noted that the state of insecurity should be addressed so as to attract potential investors to open industries in the country. Monumental corruption that exists at almost every aspect of our national lives should be vigorously addressed.

Ayedun and Oluwatobi (2011) appraised the contemporary housing and the role of government in the provision of housing in the country. It places in context public housing policies and programmes as they affect the development of housing at the turn of the country. The study noted that the lack of infrastructure to a large extent especially road and electricity constitute the major cause of undue pressure on urban facilities and increase in the cost of housing acquisition in the country. The paper proposes that government must embark on realistic land reform agenda in the country with a view to making land accessibility to every Nigerians less cumbersome as well as commit itself to making substantial financial investment in infrastructure with a view to lessening the eventual cost of new homes, reduce the cost of land and encourage people to live outside the cities.

Oyedepo (2012) noted that the energy crisis, which has engulfed Nigeria for almost two decades, has been enormous and has largely contributed to the incidence of poverty by paralyzing industrial and commercial activities. The study feels that the federal government need to take advantage of global partnerships, such as the Residential Energy Efficiency Project initiative of UK, to assist the country in a creative integration of renewable energy systems.

Bartone (1991) argues that poverty puts pressure on people to engage in unsustainable and ecologically damaging practices and has discovered that the urban poor, confined to economically fragile and ecologically vulnerable areas, contribute to the incidence of environmental degradation and urban congestion. Environmental degradation creates slums, shantytowns and squatter settlements. Akinbode (2002) corroborates this by saying that the concentration of the poor in unplanned settlements leads to the emergence of slums and shantytowns. The urban poor converge in certain geographic loci within the city. These loci, which have been identified by Aina (1990) as shantytowns are deprived settlements characterized by very high residential density, largely uninhabitable housing, and absence of sanitation, basic infrastructure and social services. Without jobs, the youth will not be able to play a useful role in society as they would be effectively excluded from mainstream society, unable to achieve manhood thereby remaining youth-men. Some members of this group may turn to escapism through drugs and alcohol. Others migrate to urban areas in an attempt to remake themselves in an anonymous setting. In areas of political and social fragility, others will achieve adulthood by joining rebel groups or armed militant gangs. Even after a conflict there is always the possibility of ex-combatants returning to an armed struggle if their demands or aspirations are not met.

Obabori, Obiwevbi and Olomu (2007) were of the opinion that for any system to work as expected there is always the need for control and, balance which is a form of regulation for standard. It reduces the negative effects that accompany physical development. There are restrictions introduced to prevent certain acts that are

detrimental to stake holder in the built environment. The concept of zoning, covenants and other forms of regulating agreement are being used to guide developers and beneficiaries. Development control is seen as a mechanism put in place to maintain standard and it is an aspect of planning that is difficult to operate in the country in terms of realization of its aims and expected objectives. The concept of zoning, covenants and other forms of regulating agreement are being used to guide developers and beneficiaries. There are recorded cases of operational overlap manifesting which allows for loopholes in development control activities. Findings in the past have showed that different ministries or agencies had granted approval for development without inputs from other relevant ministries or agencies. There are still cases where building laws and regulations are not carried out to the letter. Physical developments of the major linear roads where access roads are not provided often develop into haphazard development resulting to congestion. For a development control exercise to be successful new ideas that will meet current and future needs must be integrated into their operation.

Sustainable Cities and Towns

To guarantee sustainability in towns and cities, developments need to be inclusive, holistic and visionary through integrated planning and transparent governance. Members of the society must be carried along no matter the class of interest, business or income level while government at the center must monitor the city growth plan implementation sincerely. A situation where certain residential neighbourhoods enjoy well tarred and tree-lined roads with adequate drainages while the greater part of the city has untarred roads is an indication that the city is not sustainable.

Bearing in mind that politics and economy are local, there is the need to be concerned about the growing number and proportion of elderly people in towns and cities in Nigeria, especially as most of retired civil servants have no other means of livelihood than their pensions which, from recent happenings in the later part of 2014 had been irregular in many States of the Federation. Also, the proportion of youths searching for employment after university education in Nigeria is on a yearly increase and this very large group needs decent work as well as access to basic services.

In the past, especially the post- independence era in Nigeria when regional governments were in control, their roles were limited to taking care of basic services (providing access to water, primary education and primary health care) while energy provision was handled at the center. At that time, human migration from rural to urban centers was never a challenge. However, as a result of gross imbalance in the provision of basic facilities and employment generation between urban and rural regions coupled with the failure of government to take a lead in educating the public on the benefits of immigration, many people had moved within and across States. This unchecked scenario has created sustainability challenges in the ever increasing demand for new housing and basic services as well as rapid growth of segregated informal settlements culminating in growing unemployment, income inequality, class segregation, fast deteriorating urban infrastructure and violent crimes in towns and cities.

The Way Forward

First, when issues concerning governance, participation, public transportation and urban infrastructure are being discussed, each city or town must be able to have equal access to development finance either through the collection of taxes, fees for service to residents, a share of total income from the national or State government.

Second, one of the strengths of cities, where public opinion is taken in good faith, considered and acted upon, is the initiative and inventiveness of their citizens through critical rethinking, application of innovative non-market solutions and the active involvement of all those concerned. People should be encouraged to become the key resource of cities. Citizens need a supporting infrastructure such as places for people to meet and get organized; an attentive media to communicate their concerns as well as tools, processes and channels to create initiatives and communicate.

Third, there is a need to have visionary leaders or enlightened leadership to establish, encourage and partner with the society at large in finding permanent solutions to societal challenges through genuine public participation where comments about the activities of government and suggestions by communities of old and young people, pedestrians, bus drivers, street vendors and restaurant owners at the local level can be harvested, examined and considered for action. Civil servants must not be allowed to hijack finding solutions to identified societal challenges except those concerning technical issues.

Fourth, to ensure an enduring legacy, local skills and non-market based solutions must be encouraged as it has been found that many technological innovations and modern solutions tend to be short-lived, difficult to maintain or repair and always costly.

Fifth, the Local Government Council is the closest to the people in terms of their needs and knowledge in relation to urban infrastructure, basic services, land use and mobility planning. At the local level, common action can be taken to achieve better and faster results in climate protection and reduction and handling of solid waste since they have better and cheaper access to local information that allows them to respond faster to the needs of citizens. They have better incentives to perform well on local matters than the central government hence they are in a better position to derive the most from public resources at their disposal and are more likely to seek innovative means of doing so. In summary, cities and the built environment need solutions that have been adapted to local climate, materials and handicraft skills, maintenance capacities and culture.

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