

Retail Shop Outlets in Calabar Municipality: *Environmental Challenges to City Dwellers*

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Abstract

Calabar, the capital city of Cross River State is in the Southeastern part of Nigeria. It is a charming, quiet and peaceful place, and despite the great poverty, the people of Calabar are friendly and hardworking. Calabar is one of the oldest trading cities in Nigeria, set on a hill overlooking the river. It is quite picturesque. Calabar was established as a centre of slave trade by the British in the 17th century; it grew to become one of the biggest. At the end of the slave trade, the city was a major port for Palm Oil trade from the South East of Nigeria. Calabar holds great socio-economic significance in Nigeria. It is a city of great opportunities and enormous possibilities for wealth creation and other human endeavours. As a growing and industrializing city, Calabar is faced with major challenges such as balanced land use, land degradation, soil erosion, congestion, overcrowding, infrastructural decay, and a host of other problems. Presently Calabar is witnessing acute land scarcity in its long history; and the demand for such land is on the increase. The challenges currently being faced in Calabar have brought to the fore the fact that human needs must be satisfied on fixed land and development must be located on limited land. Activities have to compete for the use of the best sites for their location; hence the optimal use principle has to be adhered to at the expense of specified space standards and permissible development. It is in the light of these challenges that this paper assesses the level of compliance to space standards for urban development and development control measures in view of recent indiscriminate erection of retail shop outlets along major streets in Calabar Metropolis. The paper seeks to address this trend and its concomitant effects on the health, safety and beauty of the town and its environs.

Key Words: *Calabar; Shop out Lets; Major Streets; Development Control; Congestion; Environmental Hazards and Land Degradation.*

1.0 Introduction

In 2009, and for the first time in human history, more than half of the world's population was said to reside in urban areas. In 33 countries globally, 80 percent or more of the population live in urban areas. Urban growth has outpaced the ability of governments to build essential infrastructures, and one in three urban dwellers lives in slums or informal settlements according to experts.

As we may be aware, most Nigerian cities grew out of much older towns, with very little or no urban planning rules used for their expansion. Streets are laid out in a confusing and often mazelike manner, adding to the chaos for pedestrians and traffic. The influx of people into such urban areas has put a strain on many services. And with the influx of oil revenue and foreigners, many Nigerian cities have grown to resemble many Western urban centres. Cities like Lagos and Abuja for example, are massive in scale, overcrowded and filled with traffic jams, movie theaters, department stores, restaurants and supermarkets. In addition to all these, the task of territorial expansion, cultural and ethnic diversity as well as non-compliance with planning standards, extensive and expansive infrastructural network, urban poverty, global competitiveness, transportation, communication and other social services are potent for environmental degradation.

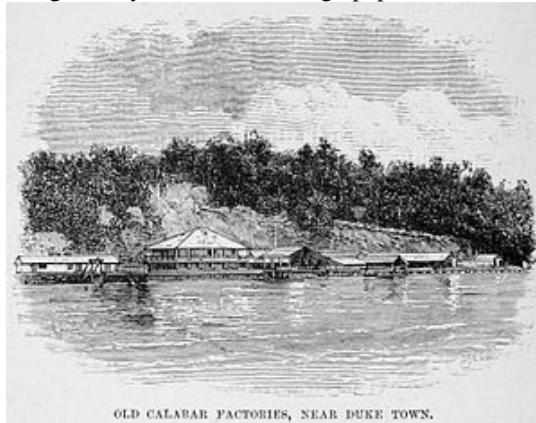
Calabar on the other hand, had very little central Governmental control over its land ownership and physical development. The city was first occupied piecemeal by the Quas, the Efuts, and the Efiks. Between 1895 and 1920 most of the land, which formed the basis of the present distribution of land use in the town was occupied in small parcels for uncoordinated purposes that were hardly ever projected beyond one year. As a result of its uneven historical development therefore, Calabar is an excellent example of 'natural' socio-economic systems at work in the city in a developing country. The systems are natural in the sense that urban development policy decisions by institutions, including planning of the city, have not yet had a controlling influence on the physical development of the city.

In this town, as in many other cities in Nigeria, development control requirements are confronted with the sheer size and rate of increase in settlements and the complexities of the tasks involved. The problem rages from uncontrolled change of land use, to unapproved change of use of property, non-compliance with space standards

and ineffective enforcement of building regulations. Development control is a potent tool for city management. It ensures the continuous growth and management of a city which can make for orderliness, improved city usage, healthiness and aesthetics. It also ensures that the environmental challenges as a result of city growth are reduced to tolerable levels.

2.0 Background to Study Area - Calabar

Nigeria urbanism, as in other parts of the world, is a function primarily of trade and politics. In the north, the great urban centers of Kano, Katsina, Zaria, Sokoto, the early Bornu capitals and other cities served as centres to Saharan and Trans – Saharan trade, and central citadels and political capitals for expanding states of the northern savannah. They attracted large number of traders and migrants from their own hinterlands and generally also include “stranger quarter” for migrants of other region and nations. In the south, the rise of the Yoruba expansionist city- states and of Benin and others was stimulated by trade to the coast, and by competition among these growing urban centers for the control of their hinterlands and of the trade from the interior to the Atlantic (including the slave trade). The activities of European traders also attracted people to such coastal cities as Lagos, Badagri, Brass, Bony, and later Calabar and Port Harcourt. Overlying the original features of the earlier cities was created new urban centers while also drastically altering the older ones. All these cities and per-urban areas generally tended to have high population densities.



Calabar River (Old)



Calabar River (2005)

The concentration of wealth, prestige, political power, and religious learning in the cities attracted large numbers of migrants, both from the neighboring countryside and from distant regions. This influx occasioned the building of additional sections of the city to accommodate these strangers. In many of the northern cities, these areas were separated between sections for the distant, often – non Muslim migrants not subject to the religious and other prohibition of the emir, and for those who came from the local region and were subjects of the emir. The former area was designated the “Sabon Gari,” or “Sabo”, while the latter was often known as the “Tudun Wada”, an area often quite wealthy elaborately laid out. To the pre-colonial sections of the town was often added a quite government area for expatriate administrators. The result was that many of the northern cities had grown from a single centralized core to being poly-nucleated cities, with areas whose distinctive character reflect their origins, and the roles and position of their inhabitants.

In the south, there were some similarities of origin and design in the forest and southern savanna cities of Yoruba land, but culture, landscape, and history generated a very different character for most of these cities. As in the north, the earlier Yoruba towns often centered around the palace of a ruler, or *Afin*, which was surrounded by a large open space and a market. This arrangement was still evident in the older city such as Ife. However, many of the most important contemporary Yoruba cities, including the largest, Ibadan, were founded during the period of the Yoruba wars in the first century. Reflecting their origin as war camps, they usually contained multiple centers of power without a single central palace. Instead, the main market often assumed the central position in the original town, and there were several separate areas of important compounds established by the major original factions. Abeokuta, for example, had three main chiefly families from the Egba clan who had broken away from and become important rival of Ibadan. Besides these divisions were the separate areas built for stranger migrants, such as Sabo in Ibadan, where many of the Hausa migrants resided; the section added during

the colonial era, often as government reserve areas (GRAS); and the numerous areas of postcolonial expansion, generally having little or no planning.

In this context, the city of Calabar is different from many other cities in Nigeria because several autonomous settlements populated by different ethnic groups formed the present day Calabar Municipality. These were the Efik settlements of Old town, Duke Town and Henshaw Town; the Efut settlements of Efut Abua and Efut Ekondo and the Qua settlements of Akim Qua and Big Qua Towns. These settlements soon expanded to include the nearby smaller villages and plantation settlements predominantly Quo, Ibibio, Ibo and Efik populations. Since the history of mankind is a chronicle of migrations, settlements and civilization, one must assume these tribes migrated to their present abodes during specific periods in the annals of history. Before human habitation of Calabar, the entire region was a forest, ably lined by rivers and creeks. It was a dense jungle, stretching from the Bakassi region to the Akamkpa area. The area was ruled by wild beasts of which the most dreaded was the leopard. But the land was good, and the rivers were brimming with wildlife. This naturally vibrant landscape attracted the *Efik*, *Efut*, *Qua* and others.

By the eighteenth century cordial relationships had already existed between the *Efik* and the *Qua*. Reciprocal visits between rulers of the *Efik* and the *Qua* were commonplace. The *Efik* supplied fish and fishnets, European goods and firearms for hunting to the *Quas* while the *Quas* supplied meat, farm products and clay pots to the *Efik*. Mutual marriages, names and cultures were absorbed, cementing the relationships that no form of human intervention in the present day can totally destroy. The *Efut* are a people of various clans who migrated from Batanga after a great war. The date of this war is uncertain. Commercial contacts between the *Efut* and the *Efik* date as far back as the sixteenth century. Understandably intermarriages have brought these people and cultures together.

In Calabar today, it is not easy to distinguish between an *Efik*, *Qua* or *Efut* person. Their habits, lifestyle, ceremonial occasions, local delicacies are similar. All three tribes can converse easily in the Efik language. They intermarry freely. Years of close contacts and coexistence has ensured these great tribes are not only related by location, but also by blood via intermarriages and offspring. By the twist of fate and succession of events in history they came to be together, and will continue to live alongside each other in peace and harmony in Calabar, a land flowing with milk and honey.

These similarities notwithstanding, each settlement had its own deities and cults. The village governments were held together by ties of kinship and religion and were a form of representative and consultative democracy, encompassing segmentary authority, age sets and religious cult groups. It functioned on the basis of customary laws and regulation, punishment and a system of fines and tributes. Thus in Calabar, there was no building of different sections or "Sabos" for stranger elements as we find in Hausa and Yoruba towns and cities. Calabar therefore developed haphazardly and spontaneously without proper planning and/or development control. Any development planning and/or control therefore in Old Calabar (except the two housing estates, the Federal and State Housing estates) were and still is an imposition on already existing complex situation.

3.0 The Study Area – Calabar Streets

According to Wikipedia free encyclopedia, a street refers to public and private ways such as alleys, avenues, highways, roads and any other right-of-way, as well as areas on division plans designated as right-of-way for vehicular access other than driveways. It is also a general term denoting a public way for purposes of vehicular travel, including the whole area within the right of way. Of the ten streets chosen for this study, The Mount Zion Street was selected as case study for purpose of further analysis. This street stretches about 1kilometer. It starts from Goldie Street and ends at Yellow Duke Street. During the study, a total of 138 shops were counted and identified comprising:

- 6 Pharmacies
- 22 Restaurants
- 3 Supermarkets
- 7 Sundry Shops (Center For Entertainment)
- 6 Building Material Shops
- 23 Hair dressing Salons
- 4 Electrical Shops
- 20 Boutiques

- 16 Services Shops: (Tailoring, Shoe Mending, Dry Cleaning, Phone Repairing)
- 7 Photocopying Center

The Mount Zion Street, like many other streets in Calabar is long and winding. It is narrow, with a span of not more than 6.7 meters wide, including pedestrian walk ways (right of way) and drainages. It can thus be imagined how difficult it could be for such a street to accommodate both vehicular and pedestrian traffic coupled with the additional responsibility of serving as a “shopping mall”.

4.0 Method of study

The sampling technique that was employed in the field for administration of questionnaire was stratified random sampling technique. 20 copies of questionnaires were each administered in ten streets that were chosen to represent the study area. This include: Mount Zion, Etta Agbor, Manye Avenue, Yellow Duke, Ekpo Abasi, Atu, Nelson Mandela, Goldie, Orok Orok and Mbukpa streets. Some shops owners were also interviewed to ascertain among other things:

- if approval was given by the relevant authorities for the building of the shops,
- who the approval authority was, and
- what possible problems were caused by granting the approval.

Other secondary information and/or documentary data were obtained from government offices in the relevant ministries.

5.0 Role of Small Businesses in Economic Development

Retail shop is one owned, managed and controlled by one or two persons. It is primarily influenced and controlled by this person. Its organizational structure is simple and has a relatively small share of the market. Generally, small businesses can:

- help to sustain the economy during an economic recession.
- promote the transformation of the rural areas through the utilization of locally available raw materials and surplus labour force. As a result of the small-scale enterprises in street, encouragement of small enterprises could facilitate decentralization of industrial process. In this way, the promotion of small-scale enterprises in the street could assist in providing a lasting solution to the current problem of spatial imbalance in the distribution of industries between the rural and urban areas; and thus check the perennial rural-urban drift which has heightened social tension in Nigerian cities.
- Nigerian is currently experiencing problem of unemployment and rural-urban migration. This has been compounded by frightening turnout of school leavers and polytechnic and university graduates every year. In this regard, small business can create jobs for this group of people and reduce the rate of rural-urban drift. With minimum encouragement and financial support, many of the current educated unemployed labour can start their own business using the already acquired educational and technical skills. As a matter of fact, as more people start and operate their employing more of the unemployed school leavers which will help reduce the level of unemployment in their country.
- Many inventions are likely to come from either individuals or small business as from big businesses. For example, small businesses or individuals invented the personal computer, the transistor radio, the photocopying machine, the jet engine and many others. Obviously, we will be better off if entrepreneurship permit our economy. It resourcefulness and ingenuity have spawned new industries and contributed a great many innovative ideas and technological breakthrough because small scale businesses are closely managed and activities personally supervised and coordinated, problems inherent in large scale organizations do not exist in them.
- Small businesses provide the public with consumer goods which would have been imported; they help in export promotion, especially in the area of agriculture thus enabling the country to earn the much needed foreign exchange which could be used to finance other projects and schemes.

6.0 Discussion of Findings

On enquiry, it was found out that approval was given for the building of some of these shop outlets. However, this policy was said to be undergoing some review. Termed *investment* or *income* property, such buildings or land were intended to generate profit, either from capital gain or retail income. It was further learnt that investment or income property includes office buildings, retail shops, warehouses and garages. In most cases, residential property containing more than a certain number of units qualifies as property for borrowing and for tax purposes.

Shop owners interviewed argued that they have to rent the shops because they were unable to secure shops in the official markets. They claim that the officials of the management boards of the markets usually allocate the stalls to civil servants. Such allottees in turn sublet the stalls to traders at very exorbitant and un-affordable prices. Also it was found out that this trend is a reflection of the state of affairs in the state – that this trend is booming is because of the financial predicament that most people find themselves since they cannot afford the cost of renting shops in official markets for their businesses.

The ever increasing population of the city of Calabar, coupled with the problem of high unemployment is further aggravating this problem. So the inability of official market sizes to accommodate traders indicates inadequacy of markets for the population. With the awareness that the value for commercial property is more than that of residential, owners of property along major streets in Calabar now prefer to build commercial properties or convert their residential houses or frontages to commercial use. It was further learnt that shortage of cheap land within the city and the lack of Government involvement in the provision of low income shops has also led to this trend.

This trend has further persisted because of lack of awareness on the part of property owners along these streets. For instance, many of those interviewed displayed lack of awareness of the effect of their actions on the aesthetics and environmental consequences of this development. Even where an iota of understanding was perceived, such owners will pretend ignorance just for economic reasons. This is so because some of these properties belong to very educated and highly placed individuals in the community; whose buildings had hitherto been designed by architects with proper frontages, fenced and aesthetically pleasing. To them, these houses have lost their attributes as residential houses alone, and in respond to the present economic realities, such additions, illegal as some of them may be have to be made.

It was also mentioned that some marketers complain of lack of space in the official markets in town. Our investigation has shown that of the three major markets in Calabar (Watt, Mbukpa and Eka Ika Oqua) only the Eka Ika Oqua market was designed as a modern market. The other two were what may be termed *traditional markets* which were simply inherited by the government. And a look at the Ika Ika Oqua market shows very serious signs of overpopulation. So consideration for population and population projection in determining the size and number of market was lacking.

7.0 Effects of Shop Outlets along Mount Zion Street

It has generally been argued that:

- retail shops are the driving force behind the economy of an area,
- it is the creator of wealth, the principal provider of job as well as a primary impetus for development and renewal,
- retail shops play an important role in the socio-economic life of the area,
- they are effective and efficient economic agent for the distribution of goods and services,
- retail shops keep the cost of living in an area by providing food and other consumer items at affordable rate,
- retail shops widen consumer choice, and that
- it also serves as mini city centre for shopping and entertainment; it was observed that indiscriminate erection of shop outlets along Mount Zion Street causes traffic congestion. Motorists park and shop indiscriminately along the street. This trend narrows the road including the traffic lane.

The problem of hygiene was also observed among shop owners running restaurants and drinking parlours. The environment of most of the shops on the street was surrounded by filths which have the potentiality of transmitting diseases. Closely related to this is the unkempt nature of most of these building premises. There is evidence of environmental pollution as domestic waste is dumped in nearby gutters. It was also discovered that the image of the street is distorted and has a bad aesthetics value. This has a tremendous negative impact on the planning effort of the state Government, the proliferation of scanty shops on the street poses a major planning problem as the management of the road, drainage and sewage system among other infrastructure proves difficult.



Typical Scenes along Mount Zion Street

8.0 Recommendations

- i. The state Government should provide a comprehensively planned alternative of markets through public participation. This will help reduce the indiscriminate building of shops along major streets in the city. To stop people from turning residential house fronts to shops Government should bring down the cost of renting shops in existing markets.
- ii. One of the ways physical development is guided in any particular community, through indirect government policy is zoning. Zoning is regulation of use of land, allowing government to pass through Local planning agencies and council to exercise stronger control over the use of land in a particular community, it is somewhat a legal exercise as well as a political process. It uses restrictions and development standards in guiding physical development, but guarantees equal protection and due process as well as ensuring public health, safety, and welfare.
- iii. The planning standards have two main division; these are the prescriptive and the regulatory standards. The prescriptive standards are the guides or specification used in dimensioning in the preparation of a disaster risk reduction plan or any development plan. Planning standards are used in Town Planning as recognized model for imitations. They are legislated standards which in most cases are mandatory and inflexible. Development control reduces the negative effect accompanying physical development; it is a highly sensitive exercise which must be done with precaution, firmness and with deep sense of responsibility by the authority concerned.
- iv. There is need for new and relevant Bye laws and regulations to channel the new course of challenges in the planning profession so that the gains associated with the discipline can be appreciated by all.
- v. The physical planning authority should not be blinded by the quest for revenue generation and therefore over density in the area bulk especially in new imaging cities in Calabar. Consideration ought to be given to urban cohesion, setbacks, aesthetics and cultural affinity, which are the hallmarks of metropolitan areas and mega-cities across the developed countries.
- vi. The management of planning approval or project for which development permits are obtained since the planning permit is not the end in itself is a major area that has not been given the needed attention. This aspect should be seen within the context of managing change in order to achieve the greatest benefit.
- vii. The implication of this to planning is that the planners should operate across the border of traditional dwellings to be fully effective in a big metropolitan area like Calabar. There should be co-ordination in the performance of the functions of the planners in the traditional dwellings that the city covers. In one word, information relating to development of the city should not be solely based on the information from the traditional dwelling but information should cut across the city boundary to cover the existing built – up areas of the city not minding the peculiar historical antecedents.

9.0 Conclusion

Mass poverty is a serious factor in the limited compliance with planning and urban development regulations, closely related to poverty is the factor of general ignorance of these regulations among the poor urban population. There is lack of a clear comprehensive urban development policy framework in the study area and implementers of development control who are mainly the local authorities have inadequate personnel to enforce

compliance. Illegal developments are seldom demolished and hence many development plans have not been satisfactorily implemented. Furthermore, there is need to reorganize the structure and operation of Local Government within the developing countries so that it is compatible with local society and economy. Development initiatives in each locality must be based on a detailed knowledge of local resources and potentials, needs and priorities of local citizens. The fact that each locality within any nation has different potentials and possibilities demands a strong element of "bottom – up" approach to development planning. That is why the Cross River state Government needs to be commended for the International Market being proposed for Calabar. We therefore call on government to speed up the execution of this project.

Finally, it is worthy to note that guidelines for development are not stipulated but the laws guiding development in any city are meant to help produce environmental conduciveness, aesthetically pleasing, functional, safe and more importantly healthy environment for the inhabitants of the city. It therefore requires collective action of the public and private sector of the economy as well as the government in making sure that development control regulations are maintained.



Proposed Calabar International market

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