

Urban Governance and Poverty Nexus - Implication on Sustainable Environment Conservation in Akure, Nigeria

¹SOGBON, Odunwole

Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Faculty of Environmental Studies,
Rufus Giwa Polytechnics, Owo, Ondo State, Nigeria
sogbonodunwole@yahoo.com. Tel: +2348068237071

²OWOEYE, Julius Oluranti

Department of Urban and Regional Planning, School of Environmental Technology,
Federal University of Technology, Akure, Ondo State, Nigeria
rantiwoeye@yahoo.com. Tel: +2348039179250

Abstract

The incessant spate of abuse of our common environment and its resources calls for quick attention and immediate remedy. The sustainable environmental conservation being embarked upon by government at different levels at ensuring balanced, conducive, and habitable atmosphere is receiving a halt due to high level of poverty. This is not unconnected to poor urban governance. Linkages between urban governance, poverty and environmental conservation is becoming more obvious than ever; hence, the need to curtail its attendant problems. Data used in the paper were obtained through questionnaire administration. A total of 850 questionnaires were administered using systematic random sampling technique: 450 were administered to the nine political wards at the Akure metropolis, 300 to the residents of the six immediate community hinterlands, while the remaining 100 were administered to staff of the Ministry of Physical Planning and Urban Development as well as Ministry of Environment and Mineral Resources on 50 allotments per each ministry. Findings revealed that poor environmental conservation is directly associated with poor urban governance through misappropriation and misallocation of resources, lack of basic infrastructure, poor priority of government agenda, improper and inadequate information dissemination, and consequently poverty. This paper, thus advocates for aggressive environmental education, strict monitoring of development activities, enforcement of environmental laws, provision of basic infrastructure, and private public partnership initiatives with a view to minimizing environmental degradation and ensuring sustainable environmental conservation.

Key Words: Poor governance, poverty, conservation, sustainable

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The interface between governance and poverty and its consequences on the biodiversity is widely recognized globally. Awareness and concern about environmental degradation have also grown over the late decades. These concerns are shared by people of various nations, culture, regions and social classes being an outcome of poor governance giving birth to unprecedented poverty among citizenries. Akure, the capital city of Ondo State, Nigeria is one of the most vulnerable natural and social regions in the country today. Since governance is the process of decision-making and implication; when both decision are taken and implemented at the mercies and considerations of the populace, the result shall certainly brace up the living conditions of citizenries. This, however, supports the assertion which says *bad governance is one of the root causes of all evil within our societies*. That is why major donors and international financial institutions are increasingly basing their aid and loans on the condition of reforms that ensure *good governance* are taken.

The concept of “*Governance*” is not new. It is as old as human civilization. Governance simply means the process of decision – making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented). This can be used in several contexts of cooperate governance, not in reference express governance process whereby elements in the society wield power and authority, influence and enact policies and decisions concerning public life, economic and social development. In this context, governance is broader that government. It involves interaction between the formal institutions and those of the civil society. Governance is the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private manage their common affairs. It is a continuous process through which conflicting or diverse interest may be accommodated and co-operative action may be taken. This comprises of the formal institutions and regimes empowered to enforce compliance as well as informal arrangements that people and institutions either have agreed to or perceive to be in their interest not referenced. Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Year sees governance as the art of public leadership, which can be considered in three district dimensions - the form of political regime, the process by which authority is expected to exercise in the management of a country’s economy and the capacity of governments to design, formulate and

implement policies and discharge functions. Summarily, governance is the hub of decision making and implementation process regarding societal life, economic development and social justification.

2.0 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Urban Actors in Governance

Government is one of the actors in governance. Other players involved in governance vary, depending on the level of government that is under study. In the rural setting, for instance, it may include influential landlords, association of peasant farmers, cooperatives, NGOs, research institutes, religious leaders, finance institutions, political parties and the military. The situation in the urban areas is much complex as interconnections exist between actors involved in urban governance. In addition to the above, legal and illegal bodies exist in the urban area such as media, lobbyist, international donors, multi – national corporations and organized crime syndicates such as the *Lard Mafia* or the Niger delta militant in southern Nigeria in decision making or influencing the decision making process. The existence of some of these informal sectors is in many cases that result of corrupt practices or lead to corrupt practices and inability to discharge expected functions of the entire system. Consequently, the lives of the people become more impoverished.

2.2 Concept, Definition and Poverty Dimension in Nigeria

Poverty is expressed today as a state of long-term deprivation of well-being, a situation considered inadequate for decent living. Robert (2006) stressed that there are many poverties or deprivations. Dimensions of the bad life included not only income-poverty and material lack, but many others. Some of them are presented in the web of poverty's disadvantages in Figure 1 below. For instance, poverty of time, living and working in dreadful places and situations, especially that borders on gender relation.

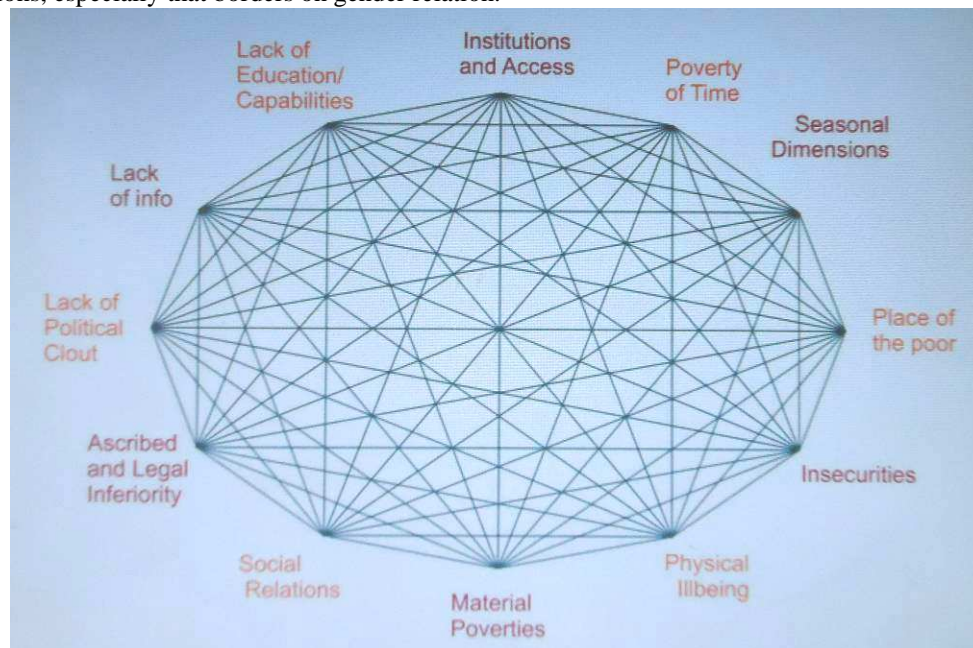


Figure 1: Web of Poverty's Disadvantage Linkages

Source: Robert Chambers (2006)

2.3 Linkages between Governance, Poverty and Biodiversity

Basically, poverty has been related to *income*; itself is no less problematic a concept than *poverty* as it has to be carefully and precisely elaborated (Townsend, 2006). He further stressed that the determination of a poverty line cannot be based on an arbitrary selection of a low level of income and that only scientific criteria independent of income can justify where the poverty line should be drawn. The multiplicity and severity of different types of deprivation can constitute those criteria and the key is therefore to define a threshold of income below which people are found to be thus deprived, he added.

For better understanding and relief of poverty, Peter (2006) reiterated that since the 1880s, three conceptions of poverty have evolved as a basis for international and comparative work that they depend principally on the ideas of subsistence, basic needs and relative deprivation. The subsistence idea was a result of work by nutritionists in Victorian England. Families were defined to be in poverty when their incomes were not sufficient to contain the minimum necessities for the maintenance whose quotation. It was treated as being poverty if its income minus rent fell short of poverty line. The *Basic needs* concept is an extension of the subsistence concept. In the addition of the materials needs for individual physical survival and efficiency, there are facilities and services such as

health care, sanitation and education required by the local communities and population as a whole. The *basic needs* concept on the other hand, aimed at establishing at least some of the preconditions of community development. It played a prominent part in national development plan fostered by the international community, especially United Nation Agencies.

In late 20th century, a third social formulation of the meaning of poverty was developed, which is *Relative Deprivation*. Under the *relative deprivation* approach; a threshold of income is envisaged, according to size and type of family, below which withdrawal or exclusion from active of society is common. Establishing the threshold depends on accumulating the available evidence, and whether sociological and economic approaches may be reconciled. Aggregating the concepts highlighted above, they are generally indicators for measuring governance performance overtime which described the typical Akure scenario.

In the case of Sakiko (2006); he sees poverty as a public policy concern at the global national or community level, which is now considered to be multidimensional problem. The same source opined that new perspectives on poverty have challenged the focus on income and consumption as the defining condition of poor people. Just like the other concepts, the assessment of this concept still better challenged governance since he regarded poverty as public policy concern. Studies on problems of poor people and communities as well as obstacles and opportunities to improving there situation have lead to an understanding of poverty as complex set of deprivations. These alternative perspectives have refocused the concept of poverty as a human condition that reflects failures in many dimensions of human life among which are hunger, unemployment, homelessness, illness and health care, powerlessness and victimization, and social injustice. They all add up to an assault on human dignity

3.0 RESEARCH SETTINGS, MATERIALS AND METHODS

Primary and secondary data were the sources of data for this study. A total of 850 questionnaires were administered using systematic random sampling technique. This was divided into 3 sections. The first set of the questionnaire, totaling 450 were administered to the nine political wards within the metropolis. The second set of 300 in number was administered to the residents of the six immediate subs-urban communities while the remaining 100 were administered to the staff of Ondo State Ministry of Physical Planning and Urban Development and Ministry of Environment and Mineral Resources. Only 830 of the questionnaire were recovered. Other sources of data collection for the study include physical validation, oral history and the use of secondary information from textbooks, journals and internet facilities.

4.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Desperate search for fuel by majority of urban poor has accounted for mass depletion of the forests in Akure region. There is absolute dependence on the forest by the urban poor for survival. It was observed that excessive scarcity of kerosene often encourage the urban dwellers to advance into the forest for extraction of fuel wood. The price of kerosene and long queue for it during scarcity period which many urban poor cannot afford often responsible for desperate search for firewood as alternative mean for cooking. This has consequently give rise to further incursion by the urban poor into the available forests. An example is shown in Plate 1.



Plate 1: Firewood used as mean of cooking due to high cost of Kerosene
Source: Picture taken in one of the scene

Poverty resulting from poor governance is considered a great influence on environmental degradation and depletion. In many sub-region of Akure, the uncontrolled harvest of the natural resources to meet the basic needs has resulted to destruction of forest resources and soils. The water and air have also been degraded. All these attempts have diminished the carrying capacity of the natural environment. The poorer the people, it simply imply the faster the destruction of the environment and its resources. Due to the livelihoods, the poor depend holistic on the natural resources, which consequently resulted to misuse and overuse of the available ones. Harvesting of trees in the forest no longer follow the selective exploitation pattern where only matured trees were to be cut down. Today forest resources exploitation is massive and indiscriminate. See Plate 2 for example. Insufficient income of the people has also directed the respondents' actions about the misuse and overuse of resources. Table 1 presents the factors responsible for depletion of forests.

Table 1: Factors Responsible for Forest Depletion

Reasons for Forest Depletion	Frequency	Percentage
Poor Income	650	78.3
Nearness to Forest	120	14.5
Free gift of Nature	60	7.2
Others	-	-
Total	830	100

Source: Field Survey, 2012



Plate 2: Lorry carrying Immature Log of Woods fell in the Forest

Source: Picture taken at site

It is clear from the table that insufficient income accounts for the highest, almost 80% of the total responses. Only 21.7% specified other factors, either because of nearness of their dwellings to forest (14.5%) or because of they see forest as free gift of nature which accounted for 7.2%.

Bad governance was also attributed to the skyrocketing level of poverty, and consequently environmental degradation. Findings from the study also revealed that bad governance destroys the livelihoods of the people because it aggregates poverty. Table 2 below gives reasons for the increasing scale of poverty in the region.

Table 2: Causes of Urban Poverty

Causes of Urban Poverty	Frequency	Percentage
Bad governance	728	87.7
God	15	1.8
Ignorance	64	7.7
Laziness	23	2.8
Total	830	100

Source: Field Survey, 2012

It is revealed that 87.7% of the respondents affiliated poverty to bad governance and poor management of the nation's wealth, only 1.8% attached poverty to God as the creator of man and maker of destiny while 7.7% and 2.8% associated poverty to ignorance and laziness of the people respectively. These findings corroborate the submission of Nick and Richard (2004) as part of their finding on a pilot survey of ten cities in South Africa, stating that bad governance destroys livelihood of the urban poor. Poor awareness campaign and lack of public

participation in policy formulation and implementation are other notable factors that generate poverty. It is obvious that dwellers of Akure rural hinterlands are not involved in policy formulation, management and the maintenance of forests around them. Adequate consultation and public participation have been neglected, giving rise to ignorant encroachment into government reserved forests and unsustainable exploitation of that available forest resources, especially timbers and woods. This has led to the Wanton loss of the earlier conserved forests in the region by both the colonial masters' and indigenous administrations. Table 3 clearly shows the level of public awareness of forest management laws and order.

Table 3: Level of awareness of environmental conservation

Level of Awareness	Frequency	%
Fully informed	37	4.5
Partially aware	206	24.8
Not aware	587	70.7
Total	830	100

Source: Field Survey, 2012

From the table, it is clearly shown the levels at which people are informed about the needs for environmental conservation and sustainability. Only 4.5% of the sampled respondents declared of being fully or adequately informed about the need for proper environmental conservation and sustainability, while a whole 95.5% of the respondents declared they were either partially aware (24.8%) or not even aware (70.7%) of the need to maintain and conserve the environment and the resources. Without any doubt, this might have responsible for the rapid rate of forest depletion in the area.

The study also investigates the availability of alternative. It was revealed that very many of the people (i.e. the poor) depleting the forest has no other alternative. Thus, the actions of government at limiting the use of forests without adequate provision of alternatives towards alleviating their poverty will continually ending up in futility. The people expression is so indicated in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Alternative Source of Fuel

Alternative Source	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	192	23.1
No	638	76.9
Total	830	100

Source: Field Survey, 2012

Judging from the table; 23.1% of the respondents indicated that they have alternative source of fuels, while 76.9% declared not having alternatives means. Only that electricity supply in the region as a viable alternative source is epileptic in nature. Government at different levels have not been able to come up with precise data on urban poor in the study area which has been a major challenge to researchers to acquire adequate information that can be used as pilot survey to address urban poverty in the region.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS AND POLICY GUIDELINES

In line with the objectives and findings of this study, the following recommendations are put forward as guidelines for police makers other stakeholders in the area. First and foremost, conscious efforts should be made by governance at ensuring adequate public participation and involvement in the process of policy formulation and implementation. This approach will enhance proper management and conservation of the environment. At all levels, efforts should be intensified at improving the processes and methods of information dissemination to the urban poor, particularly the residents of the urban hinterlands or the urban rural. Public lecture should not be restricted to civil servants but also to the general public. The masses must be adequately informed about consequences of their actions and inactions on both their health and the environment.

In conclusion, this study observed that inadequate urban governance and poverty have negative implications on natural resources conservation. It finds out that the level of awareness and adherence to environmental conservation is also very low. Urban residents in Akure are moving into the proximal forests for timber and fuel wood extraction which all levels of governance must put affordable and reliable alternative energy in place for the urban dwellers and the rural member. The people must also been taught the need to embrace restoration approach and strategy for sustainable management of the environment. Another effort that can rescue both the environment and the poor is through job creation. Once gainfully employed, the people will be able to afford using alternative energy source and reduce total dependence on forest. It will also enable them to afford better roofing materials instead of the conventional wooden materials. The issues of bad governance must also be treated as a matter of priority, which have been depriving the poor of their livelihoods.

Urbanization should be controlled through functional mechanism that will actually stand the test of time. This could be carried out effectively using multiple hypotheses at curbing the initial menace created by this unprecedented urbanization. Apart from that, urban sprawl should be strictly monitored and controlled by relevant agency in the state. There is also the need to incorporate private initiative at alleviating urban poverty in the area. Individuals, non-governmental organizations and community based organizations as well as international donor agencies need to positively and effectively salvage the current situation in the area that mount pressure on the available forest resources. This is further explained by the absence of alternative energy for the poor class and the people proximity or accessibility to forest. To effectively implement the forgoing for sustainable development in the area, infrastructural expansion and development have to be adequately embarked upon. Transportation route should be improved while better means of mobility are provided.

REFERENCES

- Aigbokhan, B.E. (2008): *Growth, Inequality and Poverty in Nigeria*; United National Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- Devas, N. and Batley, R. (2004): *Urban Governance and Poverty: Lessons from a study of ten cities*.
- Edward, P. (2006): *The Ethical Poverty Line: A Moral Definition of Absolute Poverty*; page 14.
- Fukada-Parr, S. (2006): *The human poverty index: A multidimensional measure on poverty in focus*; UNDP International Poverty Centre.
- Robert Chambers (2006): *What is poverty? Who asks? Who answers? International Poverty Centre: Poverty in focus*; Institute of Development Studies, Sussex, UK
- Townsend, P. (2006): *What is power? An historical perspective on poverty in focus*; UNDP International Poverty Centre, pp. 5 & 6

This academic article was published by The International Institute for Science, Technology and Education (IISTE). The IISTE is a pioneer in the Open Access Publishing service based in the U.S. and Europe. The aim of the institute is Accelerating Global Knowledge Sharing.

More information about the publisher can be found in the IISTE's homepage:

<http://www.iiste.org>

CALL FOR JOURNAL PAPERS

The IISTE is currently hosting more than 30 peer-reviewed academic journals and collaborating with academic institutions around the world. There's no deadline for submission. **Prospective authors of IISTE journals can find the submission instruction on the following page:** <http://www.iiste.org/journals/> The IISTE editorial team promises to review and publish all the qualified submissions in a **fast** manner. All the journals articles are available online to the readers all over the world without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. Printed version of the journals is also available upon request of readers and authors.

MORE RESOURCES

Book publication information: <http://www.iiste.org/book/>

Recent conferences: <http://www.iiste.org/conference/>

IISTE Knowledge Sharing Partners

EBSCO, Index Copernicus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, JournalTOCS, PKP Open Archives Harvester, Bielefeld Academic Search Engine, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB, Open J-Gate, OCLC WorldCat, Universe Digital Library, NewJour, Google Scholar

