

## Governing Nigerian Urban Centres

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### Abstract

Unprecedented rapid urbanization, coupled with ineffective service delivery, corruption and intensification of poverty among the urban population are major problems Nigerian governments at the Federal, State and Local levels have to overcome if the country is to make any headway in its development goals. The extent of rapid urbanization in the country can be viewed from the fact that the urban population currently stands at an estimated 43% of the total national population of 140 million people. In 1950, the percentage of total Nigerians living in the urban centres of more than 20,000 was less than 15 per cent. The rapidity of urbanization in Nigeria, both in spatial and demographic terms, has not been met with an effective system of policy making with regards to urban planning. This has led to a rise in slums and ineffective service delivery systems in the cities. A majority of Nigerians in the cities live in slums, without access to basic services such as housing, primary health care, pipe borne water etc. Service delivery has therefore become one of the most serious problems in the urban areas. The article argues that if these problems are to be overcome, a policy should be put in place to cart out a role for the Federal Government, reduce corruption through community driven checks and balances which will ensure effective citizen participation. Moreover, the local governments should have the skilled manpower to deal with the problems of urbanization

**Key Words:** Rapid Urbanization, Urban Governance, Service Delivery, Corruption, Accountability

### INTRODUCTION

The rate of urbanization in Nigeria reflects the trend on the African continent, recognized as the most rapid in the world. Nigeria entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century faced with unprecedented rapid urbanization, compounded by an intensification of poverty among the urban population. Currently the urban population in Nigeria is estimated to be at 43% of the total national population of 140,000,000. In 1950, the percentage of total Nigerians living in the urban centres of more than 20,000 was less than 15 per cent. By 1975, this has risen to 23.4 per cent and by the year 2000, the proportion of urban population had gone up to about 43.5 per cent. In 1989, it was estimated that there were seven cities in Nigeria with populations of over one million people; 18 cities with over 500,000 people; 36 with over 200,000 people; 78 cities with over 100,000 people; and 5,050 towns with over 20,000 people (Onibokun: 1989). This is a reflection of the trend in most African countries. According to UN-HABITAT State of African Cities Report for 2010, Africa had a population of one billion in 2009, with about 40 per cent of this figure living in cities. By the year 2030, Africa will become 50 per cent urbanized, and by the year 2050, the cities will host 1.23 billion people, totalling 60 per cent of all Africans. Before then, the UN-Habitat report for 2001 had predicted that the proportion of Africans living in urban areas will increase to 46% by 2020, 52% in 2025 (Njoh:2003) and 53% by 2030. The World Bank in 1995 predicted that the projected tripling of the urban populations spells social and political disaster, unless urgent action is initiated today.

The scale and rapidity of urbanization in Nigeria, both in spatial and demographic terms, has fuelled the high demand within the cities for land, housing and social services. Most urban residents are denied decent means of livelihood. A majority of Nigerians in the cities live in slum settlements, with income levels below subsistence and a dominant mode of livelihood located in non-formal sectors. Most urban residents have no access to basic services such as primary health care and basic security. Most cities lack adequate supply of pipe borne water, huge mountains of garbage occupy large areas in the cities due to a lack or near absence of an efficient waste disposal system, proper health care facilities are inexistent, affordable housing is still a dream for workers, and the public primary and secondary school systems are in a state of near collapse. Service delivery has therefore become one of the most serious problems of urban governance in the country. Poor service delivery in Nigerian cities has been attributed to poor planning but in most cases, good urban planning policies become ineffective due to poor

implementation, as exemplified in the case of Abuja, the capital city. The Master Plan for Abuja was prepared in such a way that land use, infrastructure, housing, transportation, recreation, economic and social services are coordinated and inter-related. Adherence to the Master Plan could lead to the creation of a modern city with a clean and healthy environment free from filth, pollution, traffic jams etc. However, successive governments during the military era started distorting the master plan, with the result that some of the problems of cities such as Lagos started creeping into Abuja. As pointed out by Analysis magazine;

*“These distortions came about because the political leaders, as well as senior civil servants in charge of land allocation in the Ministry of the Federal Capital Territory started poaching into the Green and Recreational areas. Plots in these areas were given to cronies of ministers, highly placed public officials and people who could afford the millions of naira for just a plot in the city”.*  
(Analysis Vol.3 No. 5 December 2003)

These distortions led to a situation where people started building on sewer lines, water pipelines as well as on areas reserved for roads and on plots for schools. This is the kind of situation that exists in Lagos, Nigeria’s former capital. Lagos is a city that has been described as having the most extreme case of urban ataxia and has become a metropolis out of control:

*“Lagos teems with inadequate services, uncollected garbage, unmoving traffic, inefficient institutions and unbridled corruption in the public and private sector.” Power failures have become chronic, public transport has been inundated, port facilities have been stretched to their limits, and the city’s government has threatened to break down amidst charges of corruption, mismanagement, and financial incompetence”.* (Dogan and Kasarda:1988:22)

Situations like these usually result in what Dogan and Kasarda (ibid) call “urban pathology” where the negative effects of urbanization can outweigh the positive effects. According to them;

*“Urban pathology can take the form of traffic congestion, air pollution, water pollution, crowding and so on, compensated for by certain advantages; more opportunities for jobs, doctors, schools, cultural attractions or leisure activities. Rapid growth in some fields unaccompanied by growth in other fields creates disequilibrium. Demographic growth without economic growth or without parallel construction of houses, roads, hospitals etc. engenders unbalanced development. Urban pathology is not primarily related to city size- but to the degree of harmony between its various parts. A city can be giant and have few pathological functions; it can be relatively small and be seriously pathological”.*

## 1.1 FEDERAL AND STATE GOVERNMENTS’ RESPONSE TO PROBLEMS OF RAPID URBANIZATION

Dealing with the consequences of Nigeria’s rapid rate of urbanisation is a major challenge. Successive Nigerian governments have not paid sufficient attention to urbanization problems in the country. Little attention was given to urban planning in the National Development plans of the 1970s. The 1979 constitution makes no mention of the role of the Federal Government in urban planning. Even the local government reforms of 1976 and 1991 initiated by the military regimes of General Obasanjo and General Ibrahim Babangida focused mainly on streamlining intergovernmental relations and functions, improving institutional efficiency and granting more autonomy to local governments. Hardly was there any mention of the role local governments should play in urban development. The Federal Government however started outlining policies on urbanization in the mid-1990s. At the fifth session of the UN Commission of Sustainable Development, the government stated that;

*“The problems and challenges posed by rapid urbanization in the country are immense. Among these are inadequate shelter resulting in overcrowding, inadequate and inefficient transportation systems, poor infrastructure facilities and services, development of slum areas in cities such as Lagos, Ibadan, Kano, and Port Harcourt, and generally poor environmental conditions. In the Government’s various efforts at attaining sustainable human settlement development, several constraints to planning and implementation of physical development have been experienced. These constraints include: rapid rate of urbanization; declining socioeconomic standards; fund limitations; human resource*

*deficiencies; fluctuating political will; unintegrated policy focus; dearth of base maps; inadequate database for planning and monitoring; and insufficient foreign technical assistance”<sup>1</sup>*

In 2002, the Federal Government introduced the National Urban Development Policy (NUDP) with the goal of developing “a dynamic system of urban settlements, which will foster sustainable economic growth, promote efficient urban and regional development and ensure improved standard of living and well-being of all Nigerians.” The NUDP prescribed strategies and actions to be implemented at all levels of government in the short, medium and long term. Crucially, it recommended the devolution of adequate powers to Local Government Authorities (LGAs) as well as improved revenue and financial arrangements. Furthermore, the NUDP recognized that the present structure of LGAs is not conducive to “the practice of democracy and good urban governance” and that there is a need to **“re-connect urban local government in Nigeria with the citizens which it is expected to serve.”** (emphasis mine). Consequently, the NUDP called for a categorization of Nigeria’s urban centres into towns, cities, metropolitan centres and mega cities and the provision of appropriate powers, structures and resources for these various types of urban centres so that they can meet the challenges that they are respectively faced with.

The enactment of this policy meant that even though the country operates a federal system, it was widely accepted that the Federal Government could legislate for the States on urban planning. However, this development was short-lived because a legal challenge was filed before the Supreme Court by the Lagos State Government, and it was finally settled that the Federal Government cannot legislate for any of the 36 States on urban planning. Consequently, there is no centralized national planning of cities in Nigeria at present and this has led to the entrenchment of local planning autonomy even in respect of Federal Government owned land in the States. Many State Governments have further devolved their planning powers to the Local Government Authorities through the establishment of Local Planning Offices. The major problem here however is that the local governments hardly have the skilled and competent manpower to manage or even engage in urban planning. Most senior staff of local governments in the country do not possess the pre-requisite qualifications to enable them perform their functions effectively.

In a study titled *“Capacity Assessment of Human and Institutional Resources of Local Governments”* conducted for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) by the Departments of Local Government Studies of Ahmadu Bello University in the North, University of Nigeria Nsukka in the East and Obafemi Awolowo University in the South West,<sup>2</sup> it was found out that only about 28% of local government officials at the first three top career positions hold a first university degree or its equivalent, whilst only 4% possessed a second degree and a negligible 0.5% had a doctorate degree. The rest hold varying professional certificates in Nursing, Accountancy and other technical fields. The study similarly found out that many local governments in the country did not have a single medical doctor or radiographer in the health department whilst a lot of departments were overstaffed with under trained and unproductive personnel. (UNDP Survey1997:7). The negative implications of these findings for effective planning of urban centres and policy implementation are very obvious.

The study conducted by the three universities discovered the existence of wide gaps between planned projects and implemented projects in the urban areas. A large percentage of the projects initiated in the urban areas either did not see the light of the day, or were abandoned during their execution. Only about 38% of projects initiated by local governments throughout the country were executed, and out of this figure, 56% were still under implementation many years after the commencement of the project, whilst 49% had been completely abandoned<sup>3</sup>. The table overleaf provides the viewpoints of a random sampling of the residents of Lagos state with regards to the nature of physical and social infrastructure in the local governments of the state, as a result of this state of affairs.

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<sup>1</sup> Nigerian Government Policy Document on Urbanization at the fifth session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development. April 1997

<sup>2</sup> The three universities, Ahmadu Bello in the North, Obafemi Awolowo in the West and Nsukka in the East were formally designated as Training Centres for local government staff throughout the country in 1979

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

TABLE I

INFSTRCUTURE	Poor (in %)	Fair (in %)	Good (in %)	TOTAL
Roads	67.8	21.7	10.9	100
Drainage	85.5	11.4	-	99.9
Healthcare	66.9	25.5	-	100
Markets	38.2	40.4	2.5	99.2
Education	46.7	40.2	-	100
Food Sufficiency	48.6	33.7	3.3	100
Environmental Hygiene	79.4	16.8	3.8	100
Potable Water	85.9	12.0	2.1	100
Employment	78.8	14.1	4.1	99.0
Waste Disposal	68.2	24.7	7.1	100
Security of Life and Property	72.8	23.4	0	100
Electricity	85.2	13.7	-	100
Housing	66.8	28.3	-	99.3
Transportation	19.7	53.0	6	99.4

Source: Integrity, 2000 (The Budget as a Tool for Ensuring Good Governance)

There have been moves at the federal legislature to constitutionally reverse the trend whereby the federal government does not have a say in urban planning. In 2010, the Chairman of the House of Representatives Committee on Urban Development, Hon. Abdullahi Umar Farukh stated that a sub-committee of his Committee has been constituted to closely examine this issue. According to him,

*"We are emphatic on the review of the Constitution to give prominence to Urban and Regional Development planning particularly as it concerns roles of different levels of government. It is our considered view that urban planning should be in the Concurrent Legislative List. It is very necessary to obtain the support of all stakeholders on this," (DAILY Trust Newspaper 5<sup>th</sup> May 2010)*

Up till now however, nothing has been heard from the committee on the proposed constitutional review.

## 1. INSTITUTING STRUCTURES AND MECHANISMS FOR ENSURING GOOD URBAN GOVERNANCE

There is the need to restructure the way urban centres are governed in the country. While the state and federal governments seem to pay attention, at least on paper, to the challenges of urbanization, both levels of government still continue with a mode of governance whose institutions, procedures, norms and values exclude the majority of the urban poor, criminalising much of their means of livelihood and denying them access to public assets. This is a rather worn out, nay, outmoded a mode of governance which exacerbates urban poverty. Urban governance should be re-focused to give more say to urban residents in decision making on issues which affects their lives. The major problem in the urban centres revolves around the question of service delivery and residents should play a central role here. Hence there should be a change in strategy, a shift in the focus of analysis from internal procedural issues to the external environmental issues involving organisations and individuals outside the system in the delivery of urban services.

The structures of urban local governments should be re-designed to empower local communities and promote popular participation in decision making. Local unions and other Community Based Organisations (CBOs) whose

behaviour can significantly influence the performance of service delivery systems in our cities should be key players in the system. How can this be accomplished?

An organic relationship needs to be developed between local authorities and communities so as to harness the potential energies of the people in governing the urban centres through participation and engagement. Any reform process directed at governing Nigeria's urban centres should avoid the disjuncture between national institutions, local authorities and civil society. This is a major problem encountered in the reforms of local governments undertaken so far. There should be a re-orientation of focus. This re-orientation should be based on establishing an organic link between local political leaders, administrators and the urban dwellers. Good urban governance should not merely be defined by the designation of municipal responsibilities and revenue source, as is the case at present. Political leaders and administrators in the urban centres should reach out to communities and their associations. In other words, the relationship between local authorities and local communities need to be re-aligned so as to ensure that devolved power, functions and resources can be effectively handled by both.

## 2. Conclusion.

To enhance urban governance therefore, everything must be done to remove the prevailing dichotomy (the "them and us" mentality) between urban authorities and urban dwellers. This requires a synergy between informal urban structures and the formal ones. A majority of urban residents nowadays have created informal institutional structures in which they contribute both financially and materially to provide services which urban authorities have failed to provide, such as security, rehabilitation of primary schools, filling of potholes in neighbourhood streets etc. There is the need to involve and integrate them in the formal urban management structures. To do this would entail three steps;

- First, the informal institutions that have emerged to deal with particular problems must be officially and legally recognised
- These institutions must be integrated into the normal processes of urban management
- Efforts must be made to progressively change the procedures of these institutions to gradually align them with the existing modern urban management system.

For more effective governing of the urban centres therefore, it would be necessary to identify all the neighbourhood organisations in the city, unearth and analyses the nature of their leadership and how they are organized, and, in the final analysis, integrate them in the overall structure of urban administration. Neighbourhood leadership must be entrusted to individuals through whom information can flow from the council to residents of neighbourhoods and vice versa. To reduce the level of alienation in urban areas, people must simply know more about what is going on in their cities. The lack of serious interactive relations between the urban management authorities and urban residents not only means a failure to mobilize abundant local resources, but also the absence of a local mechanism for ensuring public accountability and inducing greater transparency in governance of urban communities. To this extent, any serious program of reform of urban government system must recognize the existence of neighbourhood associations and organisations, integrate them into the management system, and enhance their capacity to function effectively within the context of a modern city. Capacity building programmes in the form of seminars, lectures, and short term courses can be organised not only for neighbourhood leaders but also for leaders of voluntary organizations, women's societies, and youth groups. All of this will serve not only to mobilize the population of the urban area but also reinforce the foundation of a transparent and participatory urban management system.

To enhance accountability and reduce corruption, participatory budgeting should be introduced in the system. Participatory budgeting is a process and an instrument through which the population has the possibility to define the use of public resources, generally a portion of the whole of the municipal investment budget. Participatory budgeting contributes positively to good governance in the sense that it touches some of its key aspects:

- it increases equity
- it deepens democracy, and;
- it contributes to accountability

In the long run, it is good governance rather than money, technology or even expertise that makes the difference between a well-managed and inclusive urban city and one that is poorly managed and exclusive.

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