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## NEIGHBORHOOD CITIZENSHIP PARTICIPATION IN ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT IN LAGOS STATE: THE ESTATE SURVEYORS' VIEW

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### ABSTRACT

Sound environmental planning is in the interest of the society and as such those whose neighborhoods are being planned must be carried along through intensive participation as provided for in the existing environmental planning legislations. In the opinion of the general public, this is not seen to be entirely the case in Lagos State. Therefore, this paper is a study into existing planning legislations in Lagos State with emphasis on the opportunities provided for citizen participation. The paper attempts a critic of environmental planning approaches between and among the Town Planning Authority and land owning families in Alimosho Local Government Council Area of Lagos State to date. In-depth interviews were carried out between and among various built environment professionals and six land owning families in the study area. The study shows that land-owning families are only interested in how much they can realize from sale of plots of land as against establishing sustainable neighbourhoods. Land speculators still carry out estate layouts with impunity without complying with approvals earlier obtained from the Town Planning Authority as it affects the road width, plot sizes, etc. The study suggests the need to introduce environmental awareness education as early as nursery school to undergraduate levels in college. This is to ensure early awareness that could lead to active participation of the youth as they grow up to become community leaders, industrialists, academia, and other interest groups.

**Keywords:** Neighborhood; Citizen Participation; Estate Surveyors; Environmental Planning

### INTRODUCTION

Sound environmental planning is generally in the interest of the society. For this reason, those whose neighborhoods are being planned must be carried along through intensive participation, as provided for in the existing environmental planning legislations. In the opinion of the general public, this is not seen to be entirely the case in Lagos State. Nigerians who reside within cities are faced with inter-related problems of unguided human settlements that lead automatically to an unsustainable environment. There is an urgent need to take steps that will ameliorate the existing environmental challenges. The vision of estate surveyors and valuers is to be an agent of excellence in real estate matters. To achieve this dream, the Nigerian

Institution of Estate Surveyors and Valuers have consistently been maintaining a collective dialogue with all stakeholders in the built environment in the hope of understanding and responding to societal housing needs in a timely fashion.

As a follow up to this vision, the nature of the challenges facing residents in various neighborhoods and how such challenges can be handled to make such neighborhoods sustainable and prevent the occurrence of such challenges in emerging neighborhoods will be examined. The need for this approach is based on a feeling that existing physical planning framework gives little attention to the citizens' contributions to how the cities should be modeled from an inception before developmental projects that are financed either by individuals or by corporate bodies. Observations, over the years, point to professional town planners being more under the influence of the ruling political elites as against other professionals in the built environment. This is very absurd, bearing in mind complexities and ambiguities surrounding the mechanisms required for sustaining cities. With globalization and the high rate of urbanization, city expansion becomes more difficult to either understand, fund, or implement development control mechanisms to the satisfaction of all stakeholders concerned.

### **THE CONCEPT OF CITIZENSHIP PARTICIPATION IN ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING**

The process of land use planning, both at the local and State levels, has increased in scope and scale because of educational advancement of the children of the children of these land owning families. The earlier traditional practices had been found to be deceptive. In many instances, the traditional practices have been discovered to lack relevance and social acceptability because of the complex and perverse attitude of family land owning structure of the country. Each land owning family believes in being distinct and informally laying out their inherited land at will without recourse to qualified urban and regional planners or seeking approval from government for such layouts and caring less on the implication of their unauthorized actions on adjoining land owners.

There is, therefore, the need for a responsive planning approach whereby the existing gap between the public perception of how the environment should be modeled and the professional perception can be integrated. This can only be achieved through a public involvement in the planning process, involvement of individuals, voluntary organizations, and pressure groups to the community interest groups. However, the concept of participation could be perceived in different ways depending on the perspective from which it is viewed. It is, essentially, the democratization of the planning process, which allows greater say and involvement by beneficiaries. Chess (2000) notes that community participation, in programs aimed at protecting the environment, provides low-cost sources of information to government agencies. It also increases acceptance of and confidence in government decisions while empowering community members on issues that affect them. Through community participation, democratic ideas can be advanced. In line with the findings of O'Rourke and Mercy (2003), community involvement by local residents can result in a collective transition from victims of change to agents of change.

The community should be involved right from the process of formulation and implementation of proposals and policies on the physical developments of their areas. Mobilization of both men and material resources to improve the quality of the environment is an active process in which the persons in question take part in the contribution and implementation of decisions for the fact that the government cannot provide all the essential needs of the people, alone (Oyesiku, 1998). He further stated that it is necessary for the community concerned to initiate plans and execute projects that are beneficial to their

existence. Akinmoladun and Oduwaye (2000) are of the view that it is only by incorporating local people in the decision making process that the decision can be tailored to the specific needs of the people. In the same vein, Moodley (2007) also is of the view that citizens themselves can best articulate their own needs, help improve ownership processes, and improve the legitimacy of government projects. The major objectives of the citizen participation can thus be summarized to include the need to establish a good communication link with the public at the initiation of a program effectively, so that there will be no frustration at any stage of the program formulation. The objective of citizen participation should be tailored to inform and educate the public about the planning procedure in order to enable them to understand the scope and limitations and be able to select alternatives and useful policies that will be of the general interest to the community. Planning problems identified through this process should be jointly handled.

### **NATURE OF PHYSICAL PLANNING PROBLEMS IN NIGERIA**

Oduwaye (2006) is of the opinion that the existing approaches of environmental planning and management in Nigeria is grossly deficient of citizen participation even though appreciable provisions are made in the existing environmental planning legislations. Also, Okpala (2009) stated that the fundamental challenges faced by urban areas in Anglophone African countries include, among others, the continuing high rate of urban population growth; unplanned and unregulated physical growth and expansion of the cities; the challenge of mass poverty, particularly urban poverty; and the weakness of the urban management institutions reflected in their inability to adequately provide basic urban services.

Keeble (1976) states that physical planning is referred to as town planning. It is the act of controlling the use of land and the character of buildings and communication routes in order to achieve economy secure convenience and beauty. The concern of the state government through government agencies' intervention in physical and environmental development is to regulate the physical growth and change. These are effectively carried out by resolving conflicts of interest in land use and securing and maintaining a continuous improvement of the environment. It is the magnitude of environmental problems that defines the magnitude of physical planning activities in any particular environment. The practice of physical planning involves the reconciliation of the socio-economic aims of the public and private enterprise. Planning, therefore, learns from the mistakes of the past while, at the same time, tries to preserve its strengths and opportunities. This is the basis on which the role of planning attempts to solve the problems highlighted by developmental activities of the society, at large.

The destruction of the environment most often occurs during attempts to achieve development objectives, such as provisions of housing and infrastructures. Sound land uses planning and management through the integration of the users' participations in the decision making process as a means of achieving environmental sustainability and acceptability by the people. Since human beings are fully involved in physical planning processes, the challenges faced by physical planners emanate from physical, socio-economic, cultural, legal, and administrative differences created by the society, at large, on one part, and nature, on the other. Lack of infrastructure or adequate open space, very low income of the citizens, illiteracy, lack of public enlightenment, and citizen participation in the physical planning process emanate from differences in the socio-economic and political standings of members of the society. Legal and administrative problems can be traced to the non-availability of appropriate and adequate manpower, coordination, lack of political will, and absence of multi-disciplinary approach to the

physical planning administration in Nigeria. These are compounded by conflicts of interest and overlaps in the administrative framework of planning agencies between government agencies and different levels of government.

Access roads within neighborhood residential areas are blocked and sold out by land-owning families, without recourse to staff of Zonal Town Planning offices and in deviance to the provision of adequate facilities for neighborhood accessibility purposes. Environmental problems can be traced to the advent of cars, since houses in the past were built around village heads or community leaders, but with the advent of the automobile, all buildings now face the road for better accessibility. In the same vein, window openings were smaller in the past for fear of thieves but with technological advancement, larger windows with strong protectors now allow for better ventilation. For this reason, physical planning involves the reconciliation of socio-economic aims of public and private enterprise and directed to the future, learning from the past while also trying to preserve its strengths and opportunities. Again, the destruction of the environment most often occurs during attempts to achieve development objectives, such as provision of housing and infrastructures. Such problems also include ecological, lack of infrastructure, and lack of adequate open space management, as is the case in Mushin, Ajegunle and Agege. In terms of socio-economic and cultural dimensions, they include low income, illiteracy, lack of public enlightenment, and citizen participation in the physical planning process, as is the case in the new suburbs within Alimosho Local Government Council areas, which are Oke-Odo, Ipaja, and Ayobo. Legal and administrative problems include general absence of laws on environmental development standards and where such laws exist, the full implementation are confronted with the problem of non-availability of appropriate and adequate manpower, coordination, lack of political will, and absence of a multi-disciplinary approach to physical planning administration in Nigeria. Most Zonal town planning offices in all Lagos State councils experience inadequate manpower, materials and equipments to carry out effective surveillance. There also exist areas of conflict and overlaps in the administrative framework of planning agencies, especially between state and federal agencies and between the different levels of government because of the political party differences as is the case between the federal and state government in Lagos State. It is in the light of the general nature of planning problems that was highlighted above that this study examines the estate surveyors' perception of the roles of physical planning in Nigeria.

### **THE ESTATE SURVEYORS' PERCEPTION OF THE ROLES OF PHYSICAL PLANNING**

Over the years, estate surveyors and valuers in Nigeria, as in the developed countries, have developed a customer-centered strategic plan to help establish stability and continuity within the context of an evolving mandate of achieving the corporate qualities, values, and performance levels necessary to meet the housing needs of Nigerians. In fact who we are and what we do is inextricably linked to the foundation document, which drives all current and future organizational priorities, commitments and activities of the Nigerian Institution of Estate Surveyors and Valuers (NIESV) and the Estate Surveyors and Valuers Registration Board of Nigeria (ESVARBON). To evolve a changing force structure, it is essential that a solid foundation be provided to ensure stability and continuity. In an attempt at developing this challenging, yet achievable, plan, NIESV and ESVARBON need to focus on the needs of customers, clients, stakeholders and partners should be paramount. There is also the need to develop a viable life cycle management plan for the use by all estate surveying firms. Neighborhood plans, designed as a workplace of choice for employees in all locations across the country, should be jealously guided through adherence to sound management practices, within and among firms while ensuring that environmental plans and

management policies are robust. From time to time, NIESV and ESVARBON need to periodically consider critical environmental issues and risks collectively at ensuring environmentalists mandates, mission, visions and values. For a collective sustainable professional practice, the Institution should balance collective improvement agenda with individual environmentalist institution's on-going agenda both on short and long term priorities.

### **PREPARING THE GROUNDWORK**

In evolving policy framework by governing environmental planning, the government needs to turn its attention to defining standards for contemporary housing solutions, in terms of plot size for all income levels, residential estate designs, and the approval and opening up of green belt areas. There is a need to bring together consultants and all other stakeholders involved in the development of the environment to conduct studies on the housing requirements in different locations across States in order to provide baseline estimates of the number of units needed. The various State Ministries of Lands and Housing should be given a free hand to enforce government policies of providing government owned housing estates only when the housing market cannot meet the demand. Also, individual Town Planning Authority units should be encouraged to take the total responsibility and accountability for the residential housing arrangements, including estate layout approvals, building plan approvals within their domain and partnership with stakeholders in such domains. Each state should have an Environmental Planning Board, established to provide advice to Town Planning Authorities on operational activities with respect to the establishment, review or approval of policies, plans, programs, and projects in each State of the Federation.

### **BECOMING AN AGENT OF EXCELLENCE**

In the United States of America, neighborhood citizen participation activities were encouraged by the Restoration Advisory Board (RABs) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to achieve effective involvement of community based on collaborative decision-making groups. In Nigeria, the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) was established to monitor the activities within the environment. Recently, the functions of FEPA have been passed on to the Ministry of Housing and Environment.

Each State Environmental Planning Board should work in close collaboration with all Town Planning Authority offices within the State, has a moratorium on new residential housing estates and new construction sites. This has been put in place to enable a better "right size" portfolio according to site specific needs to ensure that the right plot and housing units in right numbers and appropriate locations are provided in all neighborhoods of each State. It is only through this approach that the board has been an agent of excellence in the provision of residential accommodation with related support programs as a single window accommodation service provider to all members of the state, whether they live as singles or as part of a family and whether they live in, on, or off base. The Board aims at providing effective and efficient service delivery that can be measured in both financial and non-financial terms, focusing on the continuous improvement of key processes and programs in terms of residential housing suitability, availability, and affordability for all Nigerians, irrespective of their income level or political leaning.

## **CRITICAL ISSUES REQUIRING ATTENTION**

One of the critical issues is the ways and means of educating and mobilizing neighborhood citizens to participate in local programs that can lead to neighborhood sustainability for future generations. Laird (1993) observes that the employment of 'citizens' through dialogue and influence to participate in and control of local program should be encouraged. Laird (1993) however noted that the direct involvement of the public in decision making is seen as a threat to the common good because it opens the door to self-interested strategic behavior. In the views of Williams and Matheny (1995), stakeholders mediation allows them to fight for a relative common good arising out of the free deliberation and negotiation among organized interest groups. It was also observed that direct participation of neighborhood citizens instills democratic values and strengthens the political body.

To achieve desired results, the Board must minimize the usual delays, increase costs, and increase the energy required in determining who and how many neighborhood residents are to be involved in giving the complexities of local community dynamics. This challenge is often cited as factors that militate against active participation of stakeholders in the collaborative governance. Also, the impression by government officials viewing community consultation and participation as a tiresome burden that slowed down delivery and had to be factored into or added onto the strategy-making process must be corrected. It needs to be emphasized that effective environmental planning and management can only be successful through neighborhood citizen understanding, appreciation, and participation of all stakeholders concerned. We may need a five-year plan that outlines concrete objectives and annual priorities to achieve the objectives. We need a business model that allows the consideration of alternative options in meeting the housing needs of the populace in a partnership with the private sector. We need innovative ways to meet the housing needs of members and, at the same time, develop a sustainable life cycle on environmental planning and management, which must be intensified. We must raise the level of awareness, acceptance and confidence of our clients, customers, stakeholders, and partners, if we are to become the single window service provider for meeting the housing needs of the people we serve.

## **THE WAY FORWARD: ESTATE SURVEYORS APPROACH**

Glazer, Jacob and Lank (2005) state that the government does not and will not have the resources necessary to tackle all environmental challenges in a country at any point in time. For this reason, it is necessary that citizens be viewed as resources and should be encouraged to join the government and a variety of community agencies to the co-produce improved quality of life.

Public and private resources needed to address the problem can be secured through public awareness, education and fundraising activities. This may come through four ways. First, the budget of specific agencies or ministries could be obtained from central budgets while States can access national environmental funds to provide partial funding for environmental awareness and education. Environmental raffles can also be used to raise funds and Neighborhood Association Appeals for funds can be sourced from big industrial concerns.

The views that citizens, themselves, can best articulate their own needs, help improve ownership processes, and also help to improve the legitimacy of government projects is an important reason for active citizen participation. The low cost houses, built during the Jakande administration in Lagos State, and the federal government low and medium residential housing estates of the Shagari era are good examples of community integration in favor of the common man that must be encouraged to come alive again in Nigeria.

There is the need to reverse the old idea of applying leadership power influence to allocate, relocate or dictate land use patterns by traditional rulers or community heads in different communities, as noted by Olomola (1999). The present challenges being faced by individuals building on land purchased for residential development from families in Lagos and neighboring towns in Ogun State, whereby various sums of money are forcefully charged for laying foundations, roofing, and fencing must be strongly discouraged by the government. State governments across the country must discourage the racial segregation caused by the establishment of government reserved areas (GRA) that are serviced with better infrastructure and landscape (Oduwaye, 1998). Similar colonial administrations' land use mentality can be seen in the creation of the Lagos State Development and Property Corporation fenced residential estates, with tarred internal roads, twenty-four hour security and diligently monitored neighborhood cleanliness, as is the case in Moshood Kasimawo Olawale (MKO) Abiola Gardens residential estate, which is close to Alausa Secretariat, Ikeja. There is the need for improved public enlightenment, appropriate citizen capacity building, improved environmental journalism, and education, encouragement, and integration of the community/opinion leaders in the planning process, if the interest of the common man is to be protected.

Professionals in the built environment should be able to anticipate change appropriately. Alliance between private firms or between public-private sectors is required. This is important for professionals. There is the need for creative planning by professionals whereby forward planning, involving holistic views, will be adopted rather than the present piecemeal and sectoral planning approach, which most often can create embarrassing side effects. Relevant professional bodies with competence in these areas should be invited by the public to give account of efforts made by them to tackle these problems. All stakeholders should be encouraged to participate in the process of planning in order to stimulate, communicate with, and educate them. There should be regular consultations between/among town planners, estate surveyors and valuers, architects, lawyers, land surveyors, and other core professionals involved in environmental management. To win the support of busy entrepreneurs, the information dissemination system should be highly transparent and without any ambiguity. With the process of multi background participation, businessmen should be encouraged to offer part-time services at either board or committee level so that they can use their wealth of experience to enrich the physical environment. The business environment has the financial and corporate resources that can be deployed to support the local public sector officials, who are involved in the initiation of research on environmental problems such as traffic congestion, slum upgrading, and water supply, among others, in neighborhoods where they operate. The industrial sector should be encouraged to sponsor environmental related programs on the television, radio, and the print media. Environmental planning education should be introduced into the curriculum of primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels as a compulsory general studies course. Oduwaye (1998) observed that children would accept their role in proffering solutions to environmental problems if given a chance, due to their high vulnerability. The concept of advocacy in planning should be given consideration, especially through the formation

of partnerships with multi-disciplinary groups, such as the town planners, architects, estate surveyors, and lawyers, just to mention a few.

### **BENEFITS ACCRUABLE TO STAKEHOLDERS**

Earlier study by Beierle (1999) identified benefits derivable from citizen participation to include education of the public; incorporation of public values, assumptions, and preferences into decision making among neighborhood citizens; fostering trusts in institutions; reducing conflict among residents living in communities; and achieving cost-effectiveness in programs sponsored under private, public, and state arrangements.

Apart from a collective feeling of pride by participants and tangible benefits to the community at large, individual participants would have a greater sense of place and community empowerment (Pothukuchi, 1999). In addition, individuals would learn a lot to enable them to speak competently on specific community environmental planning issues. Neighborhood citizenship participation in environmental planning and management would broaden their organizational qualities and capacities within planning areas (Ationale, 2005). Active neighborhood citizen participation would allow city stakeholders to fully understand the necessity to prioritize when they are confronted with all the needs of each community.

Furthermore, by directly involving stakeholders in the planning and implementation process, citizens would be prepared to take more responsibility in solving local problems over time. Active citizen participation would allow communities' access to the once 'faceless bureaucracy' and as stakeholders interact and work with city officials, artificial barriers would be broken down, thus ushering mutual respect. By so doing, a new spirit of working together would become enshrined when local solutions to problems are sought.

Neighborhood citizen participation would provide a better forum for easy communication and dissemination of information while at the same time allowing for a cross fertilization of ideas that could enable neighborhood residents to participate, directly or indirectly, in decision making. Overtime, as more people join in the exercise, a culture of community citizen participation would evolve gradually. Putting a community citizen participation culture in place would ensure a clear identification of responsibilities for the political class and civil society, as well as other public and private organizations within or around the community.

### **THE WAY FORWARD**

To achieve the benefits, the following four obstacles that had been hindering effective neighborhood citizenship participation in environmental planning and management must be addressed. These hindrances relate to the role of educational institutions and matters of inter-generation equity must be addressed. To achieve this, there must be a re-orientation of current education and awareness programs to include environmental dimensions in schools from the elementary to the university level. Second, adult and community education and awareness programs must be continuously financed from funds released to states by the central government. Third, education, training, and awareness programs for professionals, technical, and vocational personnel must be put in place and be sincerely and appropriately funded by the central government. The print, broadcast, and Internet



media can be a powerful ally in educating the public. Four, at the State level, local community, traditional, and religious leaders must be influenced to participate in collective education and regular updates in government policies as they affect the neighborhood citizens within the various domains.

The difficulty in accessing relevant information; inability to ensure representation when summoning community residents/organization's members and non inclusion of the process into substantive political and management decision-making mechanisms must be addressed. To address this problem, government must be transparent and sincere. Each government, at the end of its regime, must be accountable for their deeds before campaigning for a second term.

Government's lack of political will to address long-standing difficulties related to traditional centralism of certain neighborhoods, in addition to mobilizing appropriate human, budgetary, and normative resources is another challenge. No matter what political group is in power, the common good of the populace needs to be the guiding principle. For this reason, the political will that will sustain future generations needs to be put in place, irrespective of political leanings.

Most top government officials are always unwilling to implement needed changes in government decision-making mechanisms and administrative structures. This is the main reason why new political appointees cannot effect meaningful administrative changes in most state and federal Ministries. Local government council administrators are in the same dilemma. The era of automatic promotion or appointments to chief executive positions are usually based on geo-political zones as against merit. Performance over years should be the basis for promoting or making appointments to the chief executive positions in Ministries and parastatals.

## **CONCLUSION**

To achieve any meaningful and effective environmental planning in Nigeria, government must embrace democratic principles and the rule of law in whatever the people in power embarks upon. Government needs to put in place and be ready to sustain a people oriented and community participative approach. The 21<sup>st</sup> century environment will be highly dynamic in all facets of human endeavor in view of the level of public enlightenment and the influence of information communication technology on the youth. For this reason, staff of all government agencies and other professionals involved, one way or another, in environmental planning need to improve and widen their knowledge base to assist them in searching for wider horizons in environmental planning across both developed and developing countries bearing in mind the culture, tradition and level of exposure of the Nigerian populace they have to deal with. No matter the government policy direction and the challenges that may be faced by operators in the field, human beings must always be the center piece of all decisions. It is for this reason that extensive citizen participation will always remain a recurrent decimal in environmental planning.

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