

Towards ensuring sustainable urban growth and development in Nigeria: Challenges and Strategies

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Abstract

The accelerated rate of urbanization in all forms and the geometric population growth in Nigeria have been generating serious environmental problems and concern for both the government and interested stakeholders. Notably among which include problems of accommodation, over-stretched and poorly maintained facilities, roads, traffic congestion, undirected drainage systems, etc are few of the problems plaguing most of the country's urban centres. It is the foregoing scenario that has necessitated the recent concern about the sustainability of our environment taking into consideration the increasing rate of environmental waste and degradation going on in the country. Despite the efforts of the various organizations and interest groups spear-heading campaigns for progressive changes in policies, laws, technologies and development strategies toward enhancing urban qualities, the achievement has been rather very low and minimal. This development has created great sustainable challenges for not only the government at various levels but also the stakeholders and other interest groups in the country especially in the area of human settlement and sustenance of the environment in the area of good transportation networks, potable water supply, sanitation, effective and efficient waste management, elimination of social conflict and crime. This paper examined the efforts of government at tackling the barrage of challenges hampering issue of sustaining urban growth phenomenon over the years through poverty reduction and economic empowerment strategies, good governance and enhanced urban development international partnership strategies. The paper concludes that sustainability of urban growth and development can only be anchored on government sincerity of purpose and committed political will in an atmosphere of peaceful democratic setting.

Key words: Sustainable, Urban Growth, Challenges, Nigeria



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INTRODUCTION

The city is an abode of abodes; an enclave of enclaves. It represents a set of human beings and their institutions interacting in a densely settled finite space, producing and distributing economic resources, services and other values. This explains why it is equally referred to as a distributional mechanism. The city is a mosaic of racial, ethnic, occupational, religious and ideological groups. Their differences generate both interdependence and conflict. It has been noted that neighbourhoods, communities and infact urban areas are sub-sets of the city. An urban area comprises several communities while a community consists of many neighbourhood (Henry, 2004).

It is obvious that man cannot be detached from the happenings in the city right from birth through his entire lifespan, till his death. This underscores the critical position the urban centres represents in man's sustenance and welfare. The Nigeria scenario however appears to depict a different situation as the typical Nigerian urban centre hardly fits into the picture painted above.

The advent of petroleum in the Nigerian economy in the late 60s and early 70s brought with it advantages. The main advantages were increase in government revenue, noticeable rise in industrial investment both in the public and private sectors, balance of payment surplus, growth in construction industries, rapid urbanization and ostensible advancement in educational, health and infrastructural development. Infact, by the time the Third National Development Programme was lunched in 1973, it was said that money was no

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longer a problem in the economic development of Nigeria but how to manage it. Before the end of the 70s, it was discovered that the oil sector provided over 90% of the government revenue. Thus, the main disadvantage of the oil boom was over dependence of the economy on one commodity which was petroleum. The other disadvantages include neglect of agriculture and the rural sector at the expense of urban centres and over dependence on external sector for the supply of food, industrial raw materials and spare parts.

The era of numerous creation of states and local governments in Nigeria has resulted into unprecedented acceleration of urbanization processes in all state capitals nation-wide to the extent that it is feared that city dwellers in the country have outnumbered those residing in the rural areas and yet many more people are still desirous of moving into cities in search of paid employment. Urbanization which is considered as a positive process linked to modernization, industrialization and global integration has however failed to meet the yearnings and aspirations of the teeming population because relatively well-paid and secure employment in the public and formal sectors of the economy is available only to minority of the urban population.

The world economic recession which occurred in the early 80s brought with it a down-turn in the general economic development of the country. The oil glut in the world market led to the decline in oil prices which in turn brought about the decline in the oil revenue available to the government. Consequently, the country could no longer support massive importation of raw materials, food and spare parts, There was noticeable deficit in balance of payment, deep down-turn in agricultural output and acute shortage of foreign exchange. Other problems include decline in industrial output, close down of factories, loss of job opportunities, high rate of inflation, loss in purchasing power of the Naira and neglect of urban infrastructures. It was these problems that forced the then Military Government to adopt the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986. As a result of economic restructuring created as a fall out from the Structural Adjustment Programme introduced by the defunct Military administration in the country and the policy of privatisation of the public utilities and enterprises by the Civilian administration that took over from the military administration has gradually and consistently been destroying many businesses thereby increasing the number of people that eke out a living in the informal sector.

Drawing from the above scenario and the near total neglect of most of the urban centres in Nigeria, one tends to assume that the root problem of most of urban centres in the country can be anchor to the problem of lack of adequate resources, technical capability and political will of the three tiers of government responsible for the administration and management of the country and its resources.

From the Beginning

The history of Nigeria cities date back to the pre-historic age. The area presently known as Nigeria was populated mostly by the nomadic tribes who grazed their cattles and cultivated crops. From 800 BC the culture of the Nok came into existence. In the history of Nigeria, the Nok were the most well-known settlers within the region. They started the trend of making bronze and terracotta sculptures. In the northern part of the country, Kano and Katsina have recorded history which dated back to around AD 999. Hausa kingdoms and the Kanem-Bornu Empire prospered as trade posts between North and West Africa. Infact, the Arab travellers described the Hausa towns such as Kano, Zaria and Katsina as antiquity according to Lloyd (1973) meaning that these cities had existed before their arrival. In other word. Prior to the advent of the Colonial administration in Nigeria, there were existing, big cities in Northern Nigeria which formed the Hausa-Fulani settlements.

The last fifty years of the 20th century witnessed unprecedented urbanization in Nigeria. For example, in 1890, there were 25 urban centres in the country. This figure increased by 125 percent (i.e. 56) in 1953. Between 1953 and 1963 the number again grew from 56 urban centres to 185 which represent about 229 percent increase over only a period of ten years. While the total urban population increased by about 240 percent between 1890 and 1953, the population increased by more than 300 percent between the period of 1953 and 1993. Infact a reliable estimate put urban population in the country at present at more than 35 percent of the entire country's population. The figure is expected to reach about 62 percent by the year 2025. The implication of this is that, within a period of less than 15 years from now, a population which is larger than half of the present total population of Nigeria will constitute the new arrivals to the urban scene in Nigeria, if all other factors relating to these trends continue unchecked.

Nigeria is rated amongst the most urbanized countries in Africa and South of Sahara. This is because of her astronomical population growth rate between 1921 and 2006 as shown in Table 1 below.

Insert table 1 here

The rate of population growth has been spectacular in recent times. Compared to growth rate of 2.8 per cent annually for the total population, the urban population in Nigeria according to Alkali (2005) over the last three decades has been growing close to 5.8 per cent per annum. Infact the population of the urban centres in Nigeria constitute about 48.2 per cent of the country's total population and projections indicate that more than 60 per cent will live in urban centres by year 2025. Studies have shown that there are more than 840 urban centres and more than 10 cities with populations of over a million. Infact, Lagos State which is one of 36 states is larger more than 32 African countries and has a population projected to rise to 23 million by year 2015.

The Problems and Challenges Confronting Nigerian Urban Centres

The problems and challenges posed by the rapid urban growth in Nigeria just like every other developing countries of the world are immense. The explosive rates of growth have not only progressively complicated and aggravated inter-related problems of human settlements and the environment, but have been responsible for the general problem of human and environmental poverty, the declining quality of life and the under-utilized as well as untapped wealth of human resources. Presently, more than 70 million Nigerians live in poverty. Infact, only China and India have more people than Nigeria. The demand for infrastructure, basic services and housing in expanding urban centres in the country is on the increase. Housing and associated facilities such as pipe borne water, electricity, waste disposal etc are grossly inadequate while millions of the citizenry live in substandard environments called slums which are plagued by squalor and lack basic amenities of life such as shortage of schools, poor health facilities as well as lack of recreational facilities among others. Moreover, there is a strong urban bias in the conceptualisation, design and implementation of development programmes and agenda in the country at the detriment of the rural areas where there is no serious concerted and coordinated efforts towards their improvement which in turn is reflected in inadequate access to markets for their goods and services, and deplorable condition of the education, health, transportation, water and sanitation facilities all of which are responsible for penchant migration to the urban centres of the country by majority of the able bodied men and women who ordinarily are supposed to reside in the rural areas to develop the areas, thereby compounding the problems of the urban centres of the country.

Planning Sustainable Growth and Development Approach in Nigeria

The government's resolve to eradicate poverty, improve the livelihood of the citizenry and ensure sustainable development of the urban centres and the entire country for the benefit of the present and future generations have led to the formulation of some strategic policies designed to stimulate sustainable growth of the country's urban centres and the country at large. Some of the strategies being adopted to tackle the sustainable urban growth and development in recent times by Nigeria governments include:

- (i) **Provision of Adequate and Affordable Housing for All:** The housing problem in Nigeria centred on inadequacy in quantity and quality. There is palpable gap between demand and supply. The difficulty arising from the problem of mobilizing sufficient funds into the National Housing Fund has made it impossible to appreciably increase the housing stock. Other problems associated with the problem of housing supply in the country include poor access to land, security of the tenure, non availability of cheap building materials, poorly developed local building materials base and poor infrastructure on land for housing development. To address these challenges and promote sustainability of housing provision in the country, the Federal Government of Nigeria in 2001 came up with a new National Housing Policy which has the primary goal of ensuring that every Nigerians own or have access to decent, safe and sanitary housing at affordable cost and with secure tenure. To achieve the objective, the Government in conjunction with private sector set out on the construction of 40,000 housing units per annum nationwide with at least 1,000 units in each of the state of the federation and the Federal Capital. In addition, the government also put in place other strategies at enhancing sustainability of

housing provision for all in the country.

Some of these strategies include:

- (a) Developing and promoting the use of locally produced building materials as a means of reducing housing construction cost, in collaboration with the Nigerian Building and Road Research Institute (NIBRRI);
- (b) Promoting measures that will mobilize long term and affordable funding for the housing sector by restructuring and re-capitalizing the Federal Mortgage Bank of Nigeria (apex mortgage institution in the country) for better performance;
- (c) Development of a well managed land information system and computerization of land registries in the country;
- (d) Deliberately imbibing a private sector led housing provision through the introduction of incentives such as serviced land and tax rebates; and
- (e) Promoting the use of indigenous professionals, appropriate design and technology in housing delivery.

- (ii) **Ensuring Environmental Sustainability:** Existing approaches of environmental planning and management in Nigeria is grossly deficient of citizen participation even though appreciable provisions are made in existing environmental planning legislations, controlling the use of land and the character of buildings and communication routes so as to achieve economic security, convenience, beauty and incorporating local people in the decision making process so that such decision can be tailored to meet the specific needs of the people (Akinmoladu and Oduwaye, 2000).

The key challenges in the environment sector in Nigeria include land degradation, pollution, storm water control and erosion, desertification, inefficient use of energy resources, loss of biodiversity, environmental disasters through fire outbreaks, flooding, petroleum pipeline vandalization and deforestation. Many of the cities in the country are not planned as a result of which many people keep moving and developing without any plan or projection. It is in the opinion of many that the cities are not ecologically viable because of the high consumption and wastage levels of the city dwellers being perpetrated in most urban centres of Nigeria resulting from unplanned and badly management of most these cities. Hence, to make urban planning more effective, community participation as well as the involvement of all stakeholders in the city planning and development with a view to encouraging a feeling of ownership and promotion of public awareness were introduced by the government at both the central and regional levels in the country. Actions aimed at ensuring environmental development and sustainability started receiving serious attention after the 1992 Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro. After the Summit, environmental concerns began to be integrated into resource management policy and planning processes as a way of promoting overall sustainable development. Hitherto, a National Policy on the Environment was lunched in 1989 which was not seriously adhered to. However, an holistic approach to sound environmental management has been recently put in place with the recent adoption of a National Sanitation Policy and Plan of Implementation with aim of ensuring clean and healthy environment by adopting efficient and cost effective strategies with the aim of safeguarding public health and well-being in line with national development objectives.

In an attempt at ensuring effective conservation of the natural resources and ecosystems, the Sustainable Cities Programme was introduced and is being implemented in Ibadan, Kano and Enugu. The programme is a broad-based partnership and participation as well as on leveraging of technical and financial resources at every level to resolve urban environmental problems, hence the creation of Ministry of Environment, Urban and Housing, Ministry of Niger Development, the Niger Delta Development Commission, the National Emergency Management Agency and Federal Environmental Protection Agency by the Federal Government of Nigeria are among other actions of the government directed at setting the country on the path on sustainable urban growth and development.

- (iii) **Good Governance and Enhanced Urban Development:** Government realizes that good governance is fundamental to national development and that sustainable urban growth and development cannot be achieved on its own without sustainable peace and democracy. This is why strong emphasis is placed on ensuring a stable political environment, sustenance of democratic principles and government geared towards achievement of improve living

conditions of the citizenry most especially. To achieve the objective, several anti-corruption measures have been put in place by the government. Some of these include Anti-Corruption Act, the Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission, Code of Conduct Bureau and Public Complaints Commission and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). All these measures have to some extent gone a long way at promoting good urban governance and development in the country.

- (iv) **Poverty Reduction and Economic Empowerment Strategies:** Poverty eradication, which is one of the indispensable requirements for sustainable urban growth and development, is one of the greatest challenges facing Nigeria presently. The extent and severity of poverty in the country has worsened in recent years to the extent that the country now ranked as one of the 25 poorest countries in the world inspite of the resources (both human and natural) abound in the country. The majority of the citizens are poor due to massive under and outright unemployment, uncontrolled inflation, governance inundated with greed, corruption, non-existence of economic opportunities for poor due to epileptic power supply, lack of accessibility to land and capital by the average Nigerians.

In attempt by the government at enhancing economic growth and reduce the level of poverty in the country, two major policies thrust meant to improve opportunities for employment, income generation and access to resources by the disadvantage citizens of the country were introduced at the inception of the present civilian governance in 1999. A target at eradicating poverty over a period of ten year was conceived and was to be achieved through Youth Empowerment Scheme, Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme in the rural electrification, rural development and supply, rural transportation and rural transportation and communication development; Social Welfare Services Scheme that ensures qualitative education, primary health care and provision of social services.

Other measures introduced at ameliorating poverty amongst the citizenry include the introduction of National Health Insurance Scheme for the needy and Community Banking Scheme by way Micro financing scheme with to strengthening the financial capacity of the people.

Also, the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) introduced in 2003 have poverty reduction as its main aim and objective. The four key strategies targeted by the NEEDS include re-orienting values, reducing poverty, creating wealth and generating employment. These are to be achieved through creating an environment where business can thrive, government is redirected to providing basic services and people empowered to take advantage of new livelihood opportunities.

- (v) **International Cooperation for Development:** The country has been playing prominent role in cooperative initiatives that has been benefiting Nigerians, thus charting new course for sustainable growth and development. Having realized that there is likelihood of more people living in urban areas than rural areas of the country and the need to ensure that the pace of urbanization in the country does not jeopardize the country's overall development, all tiers of government in the country decided to introduce the implementation of integrated development strategies to stimulate development of not only the citizens of country but also citizens other countries migrating to Nigeria from the neighbouring countries.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure a sustainable urban growth and development in the country there is the need to ensure efficient and transparent public sector administration and management which are committed to sound economic policies formulation and implementation which give room for broad-based participatory decision-making process. The policy makers of government should not only promote and but encourage exchange of best practices of sustainable urban development within states of the federation and channel adequate and continuous flow of resources to sustainable urban development between the federal and state governments as well as between states and local governments.

It is also recommended in line with Eduputa (1998) the need to encourage environmental education in the country which will involve active participation of the community leaders, industrialists, academia and other stakeholders and interest groups since they are vital tools as advisers and presenters of planning information.

Finally, the international community will be needed to ensure technology transfer to the country, strengthening of institutions and capacity building to demonstrate the international communities commitment to ensuring sustainability of Nigeria environment.

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Table1: Nigeria's Population Trend

Period	Population (In Million)
1921	18.72
1951	30.40
1963	55.67
1991	88.06
2000	115.00
2006	140.035

Source: UN HDI Vol.V1