

**URBANISATION TRENDS  
AND ITS IMPLICATION  
FOR HOUSING IN NIGERIA  
a case study of lagos.**

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Rapid urbanisation is a major phenomenon confronting many cities of developing countries today. What is striking about the type of urbanisation going on in developing countries, is not its rate per se (Harris, 1992), but the magnitude of people involved. According to a United Nations (1993) report, the number of urban dwellers in Africa rose from 83 million in 1970 to 206 million in 1990. Infact the report projects that this figure will be 400 million in 2005 and 857 million by the year 2025.

Nigeria has the largest urban population in Africa, constituting as much as 20% of that population (Tipple, 1993). 15% of Nigeria's estimated population of 66 million in 1970 lived in cities. Recently out of an estimated population of 80 million, about 24 million live in towns with population of 20,000 people and above. By the year 2,000, projections put Nigeria's urban population at 48.4 million. It is envisaged that there will be over 10 urban centres with at least 500,000 residents each. (UNCHS, 1991).

No doubt these projections are phenomenal and require careful planning. Urbanisation all over the world has left in its trail a variety of outcomes. Some of these outcomes have direct and significant impact on the built environment and housing in particular.

## **2.0 LAGOS IN CONTEXT**

### **2.1 Historical Background.**

Lagos Metropolitan Area has the largest concentration of urban dwellers in Nigeria. With an annual urban growth rate of 11.5%, far ahead of the national average growth rate of 7%, (UNCHS, 1991) it grows faster than any other urban area in the country. The phenomenal growth of Lagos can be attributed to its locational advantage, booming commercial and economic activities. As at 1885, Lagos already enjoyed some importance (UNECA, 1972) and considerable human concentration. Its population had grown from 5,000 in 1800 to 25,083 in 1866, (Osuide, 1989). Its importance soared during the colonial period when the Northern and Southern Protectorates were amalgamated in 1914 and Lagos was chosen as the capital city. Osuide, (1989:111) reports that 'the new political status and increased internal and external trade resulted in a great increase in urban activities and Lagos attracted many more migrants'. There was a further boost to activities when Ikeja in Lagos became capital of the newly created Lagos State.

UNCHS (1991) statistics reveal that as at 1965, 32% of the country's manufacturing plants were concentrated in the Lagos metropolis. By the early 1980s, it accounted for about 60% of all modern sector industrial employment, (Watts & Lubeck, 1983). Today it has the largest sea port in the country. Thus apart from being the seat of political power until 1992, it also grew to become the busiest industrial and commercial centre in the country.

It is little wonder that people trooped into Lagos in search of employment and hope of better living conditions. It is estimated that about 300,000 people enter Lagos each year. Infact, to every natural birth in Lagos, there are three migrants (UNCHS,1991). As at 1981, its population had reached 4.8 million and it is projected to be 15.6 million by the year 2000, (Awotona, 1991).

In terms of households, Lagos Metropolitan Area comprised of about 342,091 households in 1975 and 506,000 in 1985. Corresponding figure for 1995 is put at 900,000, (UNCHS, 1991), representing an increase of well over 100,000 households per decade.

## **2.2 Urban Growth and Housing.**

Lagos was founded as a small fishing and farming island. Initially, it had no master plan. During the colonial days, it consisted of the indigenous Yoruba nucleus, the Brazilian district (for non-Yoruba Africans) and Central Business District (CBD). Ikoyi, an European reserved residential area, was developed on the island to meet the housing needs of colonialists. Suburbs like Ebute-Meta, Yaba, Ijora, Apapa and Surulere emerged on the mainland around the rail lines and sea ports. They were linked to the island by a bridge and served the housing needs of the teeming migrant population. Development was lopsided in terms of planning and accentuated racial segregation, (Gilbert and Gugler, 1994). This has since been replaced by residential segregation based on income and social status. Construction standards were alien and disregarded prevailing circumstances.

Lagos residents are mostly tenants. Throughout the country, the concept of home-ownership is relatively new amongst migrants. Most migrants consider themselves strangers in cities and their stay temporary, hoping to return home someday. Thus even while in the city, they choose to rent while concentrating investment towards home-ownership in their ancestral homes. This was firstly due to sentimental attachment Nigerians in general have to their ancestral homes. Secondly, investment in housing was rarely considered as an economic venture, but as a form of security for one's household, though with added benefits of satisfaction and status.

Middle and high income households usually live in self-contained flats. These are usually compact in design with all amenities under the same roof. Among the poor of the city however, the most common form of housing available is popularly known as the 'face me I face you' Fig 1. Basically, it consists of a long corridor flanked by rows of single rooms on either side. Each room opens to the corridor and may have a window on the opposite side. Shared cooking and sanitary areas are located at the rear of the plot, away from the main building, a poor replication of rural house planning. As many as 80 persons may share a small building of this type. Although average occupancy rate in Lagos dwellings is put at 4.1 persons per room (Gilbert and Gugler, 1994), this figure is actually surpassed in low income neighbourhoods.

The most glaring effect of rapid urban growth is human concentration, stress on environmental infrastructures and living conditions and their subsequent deterioration. Apart from housing shortage and growth of slums, other problems experienced in Lagos include inadequate waste disposal systems, poor drainage, intermittent pipe borne water and electricity supply and traffic congestion.

## **2.3 Development Constraints**

Lagos being an island, developed with severe land constraints. It has however expanded to include neighbouring mainlands, and appears to be encroaching into neighbouring towns like Badagry and Otta. Being very close to the sea coast, salt laden wind pose a serious danger to building materials. Its corrosive effect cause early deterioration of building materials like steel and glass thereby reducing their life span appreciably. In addition, prevalent high water table impede construction activities and provision of infrastructure by reducing construction speed, choice of construction materials and attendant technologies, thus escalating costs. Lagos belongs to the humid tropical rain forest. (Fig 2). Humidity and temperature can be high indeed and make demands of constant air change and cross ventilation.

## **3.0 URBANISATION TRENDS**

### **3.1 Demographic Structure**

Urban growth in Nigeria has followed a developmental pattern dictated by western influence. This is most evident in demographic changes observed within the country. Traditionally, the Nigerian family is large consisting of the man, as the household head, his wife and children. A large household ensured regular cheap labour. Children were seen as a measure of a man's virility. Male children were specially desired for continuity of a family's lineage and assured security in the marital home for women. Above all, children were expected to support aged parents (UNCHS, 1991) in the absence of pension schemes. Rational thinking therefore presupposed, especially in the absence of effective healthcare system, that the more children the higher the benefits. Thus, not only did men marry several wives but each wife aspired to have many children. Infact amongst some Ibos, having twelve children automatically elevated a woman's status.

Careful analysis and other social indicators suggest a reduction of family size. Chisolm (1992:2) strongly contends that growth rate is set on a clear downward trend, arguing that 'fertility is falling to match the reduction in mortality rates occasioned by modern medicine, better hygiene and more reliable (if not better) nutrition'.

It may be necessary to point out here that population figures in Nigeria have been fraught with controversies. Accurate population figures are not available. Besides figures in use are mere projections. Even if available figures are assumed to be correct, this does not imply continued high fertility because as Chisolm (1992:3) further argue, 'even if fertility rates are reducing current population growth guarantees future growth as today's babies reach adulthood'. Adding that 'any slowdown must take several generations to work through,...

The Nigerian government on her part has lent support to population reduction. Apart from the national population policy which tacitly recommends an average of four children per woman, various programmes aimed at improving healthcare and female education have been initiated.

Available statistics (Thomas et al, 1994) show an improvement in life expectancy from 42 in 1965 to 52 in 1991 and puts infant mortality at 99/1000 births. Also, women's literacy level rose from about 30% in the late 1980s to about 40% in 1990. No doubt, the general improvement in women's education and child healthcare are instrumental to falling birth rates. Improved childcare enhance infant mortality. Women education on the other hand mean later marriage age, awareness and opportunity for decision making. In exercising these benefits, many Nigerian women are increasingly opting for fewer children. Similar findings were made in the U.S. (Bourne, 1981) and Britain (Best, 1992).

### **3.2 Households**

Another emerging demographic feature is increasing number of small households. As the population structure in Table 2 shows, a large percentage of urbanities fall within the labour force. A fair share of this group are young unmarried men and women. Improved healthcare has enhanced longevity of the old, (Black & Stafford, 1988). In order to continue enjoying better infrastructural facilities in the city, an increasing number of old people remain in the city even after retirement. Also on the increase are female headed households, due to widowhood and unstable marriages. Although Nigeria's divorce rate does not rival those of more urbanised countries like Britain for instance where one in every three marriages fails, the frightening indications are there, nevertheless, and should not be glossed over.

These issues necessitate an increase in household formation (Bourne, 1981), albeit smaller, with differing characteristics and needs. In summary, factors which are affecting household size in Lagos and Nigeria in general include fewer children, less stable marriages, greater longevity for the elderly and higher incomes due to employment which encourage young people to establish separate households.

### **3.3 Depressed Economy**

Depressed economy of Nigeria escalated by unstable oil prices, increased debt servicing and global recession in the 1980s necessitated austerity measures at national and household levels. Having enjoyed better living standards especially during the oil boom, many couples would rather maintain such standards than have many impoverished children. Parents today, more than before, aspire to educate their children. Education is however an expensive venture in Lagos for many migrants. A cursory look at emerging households today indicate a reduction in size.

### **3.4 Household Income**

Most migrants into Lagos come with the main aim of improving their living standards through employment. Many actually achieve this objective, (Gilbert & Gugler, 1994). Housing is one of the areas which benefit from income due to employment. As the World Bank (1993: 25) explains, 'higher incomes associated with economic development permit greater spending on housing which is in turn reflected in better housing, (i.e. more spacious, more durable) with more secure tenure and with better facilities'. This indeed corroborates the assertions of Turner (1991), and Spence (1992).

### **3.5 Role of Women**

Perhaps the area urbanisation has had a most significant impact over the years is in the role of women. In addition to their reproductive and home managerial roles, an increasing number of women are now engaged in income generating activities either in the formal or informal sectors. As at 1990, Nigerian urban women constituted 20% of the country's labour force, (Thomas et al, 1994). This figure is estimated higher in the informal sector where under-paid women dominate. With an increasing number of women working and households having two or more income earners, there is no doubt an increase in the disposable income available to such households, (Bourne, 1981). Experience has shown that housing benefits from such surplus income.

### **3.6 Social Relationships**

Although much importance is still attached to having children especially male children, some of the reasons for excessively large families appear to have been overtaken by events. For instance, urban drift has undermined the unpaid labour household heads enjoyed in the past. This is not without consequences, however. Chief amongst these is fall in food production and resultant increased expenditure on household food consumption.

Urbanisation engineered the erosion of traditional social values and institutions during the colonial period, (Cammack et al, 1988). As a result, strong kinship and community ties and traditions of the support network which assured the survival of the unfit (Davila, 1987) and needy have sadly disappeared. Some explanations can be proffered for this. First, unlike in rural areas or even settlements in the early days of urbanisation where kinsmen lived in close proximity, today's urbanites have neighbours who are not only unrelated to them but also come from different socio-cultural backgrounds. Second, is anonymity and privacy which city-life appears to encourage. Third is the tight schedule urbanites operate. This is especially the case in Lagos where to beat traffic jams, most workers leave home very early and return late. They are not only strangers to their neighbours but also to their own families too!

## **4.0 IMPLICATIONS OF URBANISATION ON HOUSING**

### **4.1 Housing Demand**

This paper has tried to identify some changes in the demographic structure currently taking place in Nigeria. Such changes, chiefly the decline in fertility, smaller household size, longevity and an increasing diversity of lifestyles indicate an obvious increase in the rate of new household formation, (Bourne, 1981). Unfortunately, such demographic trends have not been taken into consideration in determining housing demand both for Lagos, (Awotona, 1989) and the country, (Osuide, 1089). Realistic future housing demands, therefore, is greater than has been projected.

## **4.2 Housing Units**

Perhaps what will be significantly different in the demand for future housing is their size and variety. Because households will not only be small, but required to be self-sufficient, they will most probably opt for manageable dwelling unit sizes, i.e. in terms of affordability, maintenance and security. Rational thinking will therefore support Bourne's (1981 :261) assertion that 'smaller households call for smaller units'.

Vast differences in the characteristics of emerging households also dictate variety in the housing stock. For instance, the needs of less mobile occupiers like the handicapped and elderly will differ significantly from the needs of younger and more agile occupants. Likewise from those of households with children. In the same vein, housing needs of the rich will differ from those of poorer households. Even within a particular household, people's experience and aspirations change over time, (Nuttgens, 1989). These changes of necessity, must be taken into account in order to get the real value of housing and as Turner (1991), insists, this value must be measured in terms of how well housing satisfies the needs of its occupants.

Such varieties can be achieved through creative flexibility in design and choice of building materials, (Priemus, 1993). Another way is the use of small scale assembly outfits like local contractors which offer economies of scale and satisfy the priorities of users, (Turner, 1991). Besides use of local contractors will afford greater opportunity for builder/owner interaction which will facilitate higher degree of household participation in decision making on various aspects of the house along time.

## **4.3 Income Expenditure**

Although excessive influx of migrants has contributed to unemployment and underemployment, many households are still able to maintain two or more jobs in the formal and informal sectors, especially where both spouses are working. Additional incomes accruing from such outlets are expended on household needs especially improvement of housing conditions, (Best, 1988). Such expenditure on housing are beneficial to the national economy because of their ripple-like effects, (Woodfield, 1989; Tipple, 1993). As these writers have noted, apart from the improvements households enjoy, it provides employment and income to several others via its multiplier linkages. The linkages are even more when local material and labour involving the poor are utilised.

## **4.4 Sustainable Housing Development.**

It is widely believed that the global environment is in danger. This is more for a city like Lagos which is under severe environmental and geological threats. Housing no doubt has a vital role to play in maintaining environmental equilibrium through proper planning. Building designs which take into account prevalent climate will aid reduction of energy consumption in buildings. Similarly, appropriate selection of construction materials will also reduce energy required for both production and installation while making for a sustainable development.

#### 4.5 Rental Option

Indications are very high that given adequate access to commensurate housing, most migrants in Lagos will elect to rent rather than own houses in the city, due to cultural and economic reasons. Investment on home-ownership is the most expensive expenditure item a Nigerian may make in his lifetime. Given prevalent low wages, competing needs and high construction costs, only a select few can afford home-ownership today. Experience has shown that where a household is able to afford building a home, the first choice has been in the ancestral home or village of origin, regarded as one's permanent home. This is most common amongst the Ibos.

Besides, home ownership in the city tends to tie down a household to a particular city or part thereof. This reduces intra-city and inter-city mobility which often arise due to job opportunities else where. This is indeed similar to the British experience (Best, 1992) where owner-occupation was found to impose strains on household budgets, inflationary problems and restrict job mobility, with severe effect on national productivity and wealth.

#### 4.6 Case of The Urban Poor

Potter (1985), and others have observed that cities and development within them have always tended to serve the needs of the elites. This has resulted in growing urban inequalities, evident in wage structures, living conditions and lifestyles, (Bienen, 1983; Potter, 1985). This is especially true of Lagos. As Mehretu (1983;265) records:

'Lagos is a primate city. That means it exhibits all the problems that primate cities of this character portray in Africa. The disparity in socio-economic status between the elite and the mass urbanites is wide. That means the city reflects two contradictory modes of living - one is an extension of European style brought about by those who can afford the luxuries of high-technology; the other is an extension of the traditional mode distorted to fit an urban milieu'.

In the course of growing urbanisation, poor households' housing has been badly affected. Their housing have been demolished in the guise of environmental improvement and safety (as in Maroko), transferred to other income groups and uses (as in Idumota and Mushin where substantial housing stock have been converted to commercial use), or have been deliberately allowed to decay due to poor maintenance. In all, there is a shrinkage of housing stock available to this group of people as lost units have not been replaced.

For the indigenous poor, different variants of the family house identified by Amole et al (1993), have served as safety nets against homelessness while providing cheap accommodation for migrants in Nigerian cities. Constituting part of the oldest housing stock and in poor condition, they are easy targets for government demolition exercises. Amole et al (1993) have however argued strongly for their preservation, offering useful proposals for their improvement. The communally built variant of family housing appears to hold great potentials for the poor's new housing development since it allows a pooling together of resources while maintaining family ties.



In the face of escalating prices of urban land in the Lagos area and absence of land invasion strategies as employed by their counterparts in Latin America, home-ownership appears to be above the reach of poor migrant households in Lagos. The only option available to them is therefore renting. In an attempt to enhance their access to rental stock government introduced rent control measures. This had inherent problems, (Willis et al, 1990), and rather exacerbated the situation.

As already mentioned, available housing stock is inadequate in terms of number and condition, and leads to rationing and manipulation by landlords. What to my mind is required is an increase in rental stock of considerable standard. Although direct participation in construction is not proposed for government, it nevertheless has a vital role to play in encouraging private developers to undertake this task. Such developers should have adequate access to finance and serviced land. Building regulations which exclude use of locally available building materials should also be revised to reduce construction costs.

In place of rent controls, arbitration panels should be set up where an aggrieved party, either the landlord or the tenant can seek redress. Such panels should be fair, fast in attending to matters and less expensive than the courts.

On their own part, developers should investigate different ways of reducing construction costs. These amongst others should include optimum space utilisation, proper planning and resource scheduling to minimise delays during construction, selection of appropriate building techniques and close supervision to ensure good quality of work, speed, reduce wastage and pilfering. In addition, proper repairs and maintenance systems should be put in place to ensure proper functioning of buildings. This will ensure durability of buildings and continued good living environments for tenants.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

Urbanisation need not continue in a chaotic manner as has hitherto been the case in Lagos. Dealing with the problem posed by urban growth require political will. Housing is one of such problems. Demand for more housing stock to augment existing ones especially for poor households is great. Any attempts to successfully tackle such housing demand must take these variables into consideration. Besides, government should make serious efforts to eliminate market imperfections which are currently plaguing the housing market in Lagos. Finally, various cost reduction techniques should be applied to the housing process and benefits derived from such actions passed on to the tenants. This will make resulting units to be affordable at market value without subsidies.