

The Influencing Factors of Urban Slum in Port Harcourt, Nigeria

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Abstract: *Urban slum remains one of the predominant challenging problems confronting urban governance in developing nations. The presence of slum in the cities is characterized by poverty, high density, inadequate facilities, health and environmental hazards and social vices. These problems reduce not only environmental quality but that of human dignity. This article assesses factors responsible for slums in Port Harcourt Metropolitan City and proffer practical solutions to the identified challenges. The metropolitan city was divided into 4 zones while 2 communities were randomly selected from each zone. Personal observations were conducted on the sampled communities using parameters like conditions of residential buildings, nature of environment, major means of transportation, state of existing facilities and services and occupancy ratio. Findings revealed that about 6-10 persons lived in a dwelling unit mostly without proper ventilation. Facilities and services like good road and drainage networks, pipe borne water, regular electricity, health and educational institutions were absent and others in dilapidated state. The article maintains that affordable housing be provided for the urban poor while basic facilities and services should be enhanced. The master waterfront development plans should be integrated into the renewed master plan. Also secondary cities and the rural areas should be developed. Economic development plans should be carried out in the state to enhance the conditions of the poor. Urban slums constitute problems which are not beyond human solutions.*

Key words: *Urbanization, Population, Urban Slum, Poverty, and migration*

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Introduction

The emergence and existence of slums in most cities of the world especially in African cities is a symbol that the slums are crucial elements of contemporary urbanization and urban operations. It is found that slums proliferate not only due to rapid development of urban areas but in attempt

for personal provision of housing. Slum therefore becomes one of the greatest challenges of city planners and managers of urban governance in developing nations.

The concept of slum is not a new phenomenon in the literature of urban planning and management. Thus, Gandy (2006) while viewing the ideology of urban slum reveals that slum dwelling signifies a common phenomenon of degrading life of urban dwelling itself. That slum represents a micro – habitat unit within a large frame work of urban built up space. This accordingly is referred to condition of defective physical, social and economic environment. The concept of slum means physically poor quality and sub – standard housing which pose danger of health and life of slum dwellers. The socio – economic substandard denotes an area of degenerated life of half starved, a place of poverty, wretchedness and vices, the homes of racketeers and criminal.

In re – assessing and determining slum, Adelekan (2009) views slum as extreme condition of bright in which the housing is unfit as to constitute a menace to the health and the morale of the community. Slum is observed to exist in all towns and urban settlements owing to insufficient housing facilities. It is mostly occupied by the poorest class of society and new coming migrants. These are the areas of high incidence of crime, mortality, illiteracy and diseases (Gandy 2006).

Sequel to the presence of overcrowding (extremely high density), occupancy ratio within slum areas are high, exceeding over 2.0 (Obateru, 2005). The slums lack basic facilities and services like pipe borne water, regular electricity, institutions, co-ordinated physical planning, proper road network, housing standard and security etc. The underlining causes of slum can be traceable to poverty, frustrated demand for housing, rural – urban migration, urbanization, informal economy, lack of development control etc.

The Concepts of Urban Slum

Due to the problems posed by slums in urban areas of the world, its definition has attracted many scholars in different fields attempting to view its formation. Thus, Steeten (1981) declares that slum may be said to include any predominantly residential area where the dwelling, which by reason of dilapidation, overcrowding, faulty arrangement of designs, lack of ventilation, light or sanitary facilities or any combination of these factors, are detrimental to safety, health and morals. Another interesting view relating to the definition of slum is that of McAuslan (1985) revealing that urban slum is an environment that lacks the basic amenities of a good living condition and it is regarded as the worst form of human habitation.

The absence of facilities, services and the effective functioning of the environment stand tall in determining urban slum. Thus, united nation Habitat (1987), defines slum as a building, group of buildings or area characterized by overcrowding, deterioration, insanitary conditions or absence of facilities or amenities which because of these conditions or any of them, endanger the health, safety or morals of its inhabitants or the community.

Characteristics of Urban Slum

The outstanding characteristics of slum can be viewed from environmental, social and economic points. These portray the fact that the poor who occupy poor housing condition and the environment usually dwell in the slum. This is in line with Okoye (1990) stating that slum is an area of poor housing and poor people, an area of transition and decadence, a disorganised place mostly occupied by human derelicts. Slum generally becomes an area of substandard housing and the environment mostly characterised by poverty with its associations.

Urban slum therefore implies deterioration or existence of deficiencies in the quality of

structures and their immediate environments. It also implies a range of conditions which are measured and could be compared to some standards (Bandyopadhyay, 2010).

The characteristics of urban slum are numerous and depend on the policy operating in the city as well as environmental standards. The UN – HABITAT (2005) while defining slum household as a group of individuals living under the same roof in an urban area which are characterized by lack of one or more of the following:

- ✓ Durable housing of permanent nature that protects against extreme climate conditions.
- ✓ Access to adequate sanitation in the form of a private or public toilet shared by a reasonable number of persons.
- ✓ Easy access to safe water in sufficient amounts at an affordable price.
- ✓ Security of tenure that prevents forced evictions and sufficient living space which means not more than three people sharing the same room.

Also, Rangwala (2010) reveals the following as some of the usual or general characteristics of slum:

1. **Appearance:** This is rather the universal mark of the slum and its unpleasant appearance offends the eyes, nose and conscience. The structures appear to be deteriorated and to be of over – age.
2. **Fire Hazards:** The area is often exposed to fire accidents and consequent damages.
3. **Health and Sanitation:** The slum is characterized by low standards of sanitation and is often neglected most by the public services for sanitation. It is sometimes referred to as an area of high sickness and death rate.
4. **Income criteria:** Slum area is a poverty area and it is occupied by people of the lowest income group of the society.
5. **Morals:** The socially disorganised slum may prove to be an area of delinquency, crime and vice.
6. **Overcrowding:** The slum is overcrowded with building or the buildings are overcrowded with people or in the worst condition, both the conditions prevail in the slum.
7. **Population:** If the population is racial or cultural, it grants a degree of social organisation even though the area looks poverty – stricken. For a heterogeneous occupancy, the inhabitants are of different categories which are not welcome in other localities or they cannot afford the live elsewhere.
8. **Social Isolation:** The area of the lowest social status and it is usually linked up with the rest of the neighbourhoods through its labour force.

Methodology

Descriptive research design was adopted for this study. This entailed assessing and observing a sample of residential settlements at one point in time without any manipulation to determine causes and consequences of slum. The entire Port Harcourt Metropolis was divided into four different zones for easy observation. The zones as follow: Akpor Extension, Obio, Old Port Harcourt and Diobu. Subsequently, two communities/ settlements were chosen for observation from each of the zones. These involved- zone 1-Rumuigbo and Alakahia; zone 2-Elelenwo and Woji; zone 3–Ozuboko and Ogbunabali; zone 4-Rumueme and Diobu Mile 1.

Population and Spatial Growth of Port Harcourt

Port Harcourt is the capital of Rivers State; the administrative headquarter of the oil rich Niger Delta of Nigeria, and the hoist to two local government areas – Port Harcourt city and Obio/Akpor. It was established in 1913 because its site met the location requirement set by the

Colonial Surveyors for a Port – terminus deep water near ground which shall be connected to the mainland (Anyanwu, 1979).

In 1914, a total of 7,403 labourers were engaged in railway construction work at Port Harcourt and along the rail line. Though, most of the workers left by 1915, the population was estimated to about 500 persons. By 1944, the population grew to about 30,200 persons and according to Anyanwu (1979), it was estimated to 34,000 in 1946. The 1952 -53 population census of Nigeria reveals the population figure to be 179, 563 and was estimated to 213, 443 in 1970. The figure rose to 231,532 in 1973. The 1991 census figure ascertains the figure to be 440,399. The 2006 census shows that the population has risen to 1,005,904 and estimated to be 1,467,586 in 2014.

Spatially, Port Harcourt actually started following certain policies and decisions in 1912 (Port Harcourt master plan, 1975; Dar – handasah, 2008; Ogionwu, 1979). Piece of land of about 25 sq miles in extent was acquired in 1911 from the traditional Ikwerre and Okirika people, sequel to the signing of the Hargrove Agreement between the British government and the representatives of the traditional landlords.

The town was divided into two distinct residential areas – European and African based on construction procedures which started in 1913. Between 1925 and 1934, the city expanded to the present Azikiwe Road then beach road. In 1952, Port Harcourt has extended to Diobu creek layout, Ogbunabali, Obio and the Oroworukwu. By 1975, Port Harcourt has covered up an estimated built up area of 39.60km squared. Within the mid 1990s, it covered about 95km sq. Following the satellite image map of Port Harcourt, by 2008, the metropolitan city has covered about 106.77 km sq of land.

Observed Causes of Slums in Port Harcourt

The presence of slums in cities appears to be associates of human existence in cities. They have been parts of the history of most cities, particularly in the early years of urbanization and industrialization. Several reasons are observed to be responsible for formation and development of slums in cities as observed in Port Harcourt.

1. Population Growth

Rapid urban population growth and urbanization in terms of spatial growth and urban poverty are observed to be responsible for the proliferation of slums. Thus slums are being driven by migration and increasing birth rate. Increasing human population without corresponding provision of standard housing, basic utilities like pipe borne water, electricity, and effective road and drainage networks remain some of the major factors responsible for the slum of Port Harcourt. Due to its strategic location as the administrative head of the oil rich Niger Delta of Nigeria, people migrate from other states, cities and rural areas to settle in the city. Also, the migrants from the surrounding areas may occupy, usually illegally, vacant or empty places in the city. These places as observed had large number of persons occupying single room without proper ventilation and lighting. Facilities like toilets are shared by members ranging from 6-10 households.

2. Industrialization

Slums also develop due to industrialization of the city. When this occurs, large numbers of people move seeking for employment. The industries always fail to provide housing for labourers. The locations of most industries are not properly planned base on the master plan. Most of the industries end up employing unskilled workers who may not be able to pay for quality housing. This is ascertained in the study area as most residents were casually engaged and usually disengaged at any time without proper compensations.

3. Decentralization

When decentralization takes place, the rich and middle class people move out to the extended portions of the town and thus, the poor people are left unattended to in the overcrowded central area of the town. It is interesting to note that only the rich occupy strategic positions in government which is responsible for the provision of basic amenities and maintenance of the existing facilities. These have created disparities between the location of the rich and the poor (GRA and Water Fronts) in Port Harcourt. Surveys on water front settlements reveal that over twenty (20) of such settlements (informal housing) exist in the city. Also, according to the Port Harcourt Master Plan (1975), the Urban Villages are left without developments which constitute slums within the city. There have been deliberate policies in town planning to create physical sections in the cities- high, medium and low density areas for the low, medium and high income levels.

4. Economic Conditions

The unemployment and growth of population may force the affected persons to stay even in unhealthy atmosphere. In fact, the most important and universal characteristic of slums is poverty. This is due to the fact that people live in slums because they cannot afford to pay the rent set off by the market conditions. Also, traditional occupation plays another central role in determining the existence of slums. Majority of the riverside settlers prefer to dwell at the waterfronts to enhance their traditional fishing occupations. This has added to the growing numbers of slums in Port Harcourt.

5. Ineffective Physical Planning and Development Control

Physical planning is the arrangement of various components or units of a town in such a way that the town as such attains the significance of a living organism. It also includes ways and means to be adopted for the extension of towns. Thus, the knowledge of town planning helps in achieving the best possible advantages of the situation of town with respect to its land and the surrounding environments.

It is significant to note that most cities in Africa including Port Harcourt do not have workable master plan. In fact, the obsolete 1975 master plan of Port Harcourt was not implemented and no attempt has been made for renewal.

This has resulted in zigzag development, conversion of land uses, and organic city growth, traffic congestions, environmental pollution and absence of development control by the appropriate authorities. In most cases as observed, buildings occupy over 80% of the plot of land. This contributes to perpetual flooding especially during rainy seasons.

6. Powers of Local Authority

The local government authority is mostly placed in charge of the development of master plans for communities. In most cases as observed, the local authority concerned does not possess adequate power to control the development of town which results in slums formation.

The Port Harcourt metropolitan city is presently made of two Local Government areas as earlier stated. There exists no effective power of the authorities toward the development and management of the town. Rather, individuals tend to provide for themselves almost all basic amenities like water, electricity, health services, education, public transportation in which their organized absence results in slum.

Also, bad governance is another responsible factor, governments often fail to recognize the rights of the urban poor and incorporate them into urban planning thereby contributing to the growth of slums.

7. Primacy of City Systems

The operations of one city system in the state also appear to be another tangible factor responsible for the slum of Port Harcourt. At present, Port Harcourt is the only city in Rivers State and various governments have failed to develop secondary cities proposed in the 1970's such as Bori, Ahoada and Degema. Thus, Port Harcourt becomes the only city for both the poor and the rich, employed and unemployed, skilled and unskilled, professionals and artisans, as well as illiterates and educated.

8. Poor Housing Planning and Policy

In the less developed countries, housing has hitherto been placed at the back burner of socio-economic policy making because there is the perception that housing is one of the unproductive sectors of the economy Obinna (2008). Emphasis has rather been on the more productive sectors of mining and industry. Despite that housing is one of the basic needs of human; the provision of housing in Port Harcourt has been left in the hands of individuals. Thus each person provides housing accommodation at any where based on affordability which is also found to be responsible for slums in the city of Port Harcourt.

Other identified causes of urban slums may be traceable to natural disasters, poor urban governance, informal economy, social conflict, politics, poverty, poor infrastructure provision and maintenance, as well as colonial footprints, segregations, and unattended rural developments.

The Way Forward

Several attempts have been carried out to address the challenges of slums in Nigeria cities. However, many have failed due to poor coordination and consistent change of government. It is of the view of this article that the following should be adhered to enhance quality cities in Nigeria especially Port Harcourt.

Urban planning authorities should promote the development of secondary cities. Secondary cities like Bori, Ahoada and Degema should be able to reduce the primacy of Port Harcourt and serve as economic points for surrounding rural communities. These cities should have Master Plans which should be supported by budgets/costs to enable policy makers to conceptualize locations of facilities for the enhancement of urbanization.

It is significant to note that large numbers of the dwellers of slum areas of Port Harcourt are extremely poor people in which some of them settle on the marginal lands (waterfronts) of the city. Therefore, waterfront integration plans should be inclusive in the city master plan as well as the development of coastal areas for recreation and commercial activities. Also, building codes should be reviewed to include provisions for design for the urban poor while urban renewal should be carried out on blighted areas of the metropolitan city. These designs and development should be inclusive and integrated, avoiding income disparities in land use. Therefore, mixed land use planning should be adhered to, within the comprehensive plans. It is found that mixed land use changes the image and perception of cities and enhances social balance.

Housing plays dominant roles in the development and reduction of slums. Thus technological local materials be encouraged in housing construction to enhance affordable housing for the urban poor. Effective housing and development strategies

should also be provided to reduce rural-urban migration which is predominant in Rivers State.

Conclusion

The effects of urban slums remain highly dangerous to the existence of human within the area and the aesthetic nature of the city's environment. Sequel to the central role in which cities play to the national economy, it becomes necessary that slums should be addressed from the points of identified causes to enhance effective functioning of cities especially Port Harcourt.

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