



# **An Assessment of Urban Poverty in the Marginal Lands of Port Harcourt**

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***Abstract:** Urban poverty is generally associated with slums, squatter settlements and labour sector. Such settlements are measured base on low sanitation, income, deplorable housing, and poor accessibility to basic amenities leading to opportunities required for urban survival. This assesses urban poverty in the marginal lands of Port Harcourt. It considers parameters in assessing poverty. 1534 questionnaires representing 30% of the identified households were in 6 out of the 21 functional marginal settlements. Findings revealed poor accessibility to education, employment, portable water, electricity, sanitation and security. The income level remains very low with large number of persons per household. The buildings are made of mud, plywood and corrugated iron sheets without access and even toilet facilities. These have collectively led to dehumanized situation and environmental degradation. Urban government needs to urgently address problems in such areas.*

***Keywords:** Urbanization, Poverty, Deprivation, Physical planning, Marginal lands and management*

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## **Introduction**

Urbanization refers to increase in the number of persons (population) within the urban area resulting in spatial expansion. Historically, urbanization in Africa began during the twentieth century. Thus, according to Beauchemin and Bocquier (2003), urbanization is a process, a course of action with the end result in accumulation of people, physical development and capital, and once had root the colonial era when centres were developed to control and administer the colonized territories and to exploit and export their natural resources. Urbanization therefore leads to the development of urban areas.

The word urban seems like a simple enough concept to grasp, but its actually has many interpretations. It is derived from the Latin word urbanus- meaning characteristic of, or pertaining to, the city. Urban essentially holds that connotation to most people. There are varying criteria for defining an urban area that exist among countries and urban population. These criteria include administrative function (a national or regional capital, economic characteristics (more than half the residents in non- agricultural occupation), functional nature

(existence of paved streets, water supply, and sewerage and electricity systems) and population size or population density (number of people living within a square mile or kilometre).

The urban area becomes more interesting and is more than what personal experiences reveal. It is a dynamic entity unto itself, the most powerful drawing card in human history. According to United Nations Population Division (2008) while analysing the trends of city over time reveals that in 1900, cities were home to just 9 percent of the world's population, in 1950, cities were home to 30 percent, and then to 47 percent in 2000. It is estimated that if the present trends continue, by 2030 cities will be home to 60 percent of humanity.

Sequel to the growing number of people who daily born or migrate to the city, the city becomes the setting for all aspects of the human drama- the highest learning colliding with the grossest ignorance, and unimaginable wealth juxtaposed with the most abject poverty. Historically, most people drawn to the city have been able to realize their hopes of a higher standard of living in terms of quality education, employment, liveable income, electricity, paved streets, pipe borne water, better housing and health care facilities, but this may not actually be the situation in most metropolitan cities in developing nations especially in Port Harcourt.

Cities in developing nations are adding millions of new residents so rapidly that they cannot provide basic services to many of their residents. These deficiencies have resulted in gross ecological disasters and deplorable human conditions as portrayed in suffering and poverty. The urban poor mostly live in slums with the absence of functional and liveable facilities. The growth of shanty towns on the periphery of the city is one of the major challenges of urbanization (UNCHS, 2005). These settlements have many names: bidonvilles (tin-can cities) in former French African colonies, bustees in India, los villas miserias ( cities of the miserable) throughout Latin America and waterside in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. They also take many forms: mud and cardboard shacks outside Seoul, Korea; and shacks in Africa and Latin America made from cast- lumber and tin and junks moored in Hong Kong harbour. According to Rabinovitch ( 2000), their varying names and forms however are incidental to one underlying truth: they are the locales of abject poverty, malnutrition, poor sanitation and disease. A determination of strong family ties, and steadfast hope are often their positive counterparts as the inhabitants cling to the edge of survival, but these shanty towns nonetheless constitute the worst side of urban life in the developing world. Thus, these settlements become habitable homes of the urban poor.

According to Rakodi (2002), in urban poverty discourse, local governance is emphatically argued in favour and is attributed prerequisites in tackling urban poverty. However, the urban poor live with many deprivations which characterize their status. These include inadequate and insecure housing, unhealthy environment, low income due to gross un- and underemployment, lack of basic amenities and poor participation in urban governance. According to UN- Habitat (2002), good urban governance is characterized by equity, transparency, sustainability, efficiency, security, civil engagement and citizenship. Absence of good urban governance results in deprivation. Deprivation occurs when people are unable to reach a certain level of functioning or capability ( Mabogunje, 2008). Deprivation is observed to be dominant in the study area. This study reveals a uniquely powerful form of human settlement- the marginal lands of Port Harcourt; a physical and socio- economic environment with the potential of both satisfying but now frustrating the entire spectrum of human needs.

Port Harcourt is the capital of Rivers State, the administrative headquarters of the oil rich Niger Delta of Nigeria and the hoist to two major local government areas – Port Harcourt city and Obio Akpor. The metropolitan city also owns a major sea port, a petro- chemical complex and oil refinery as well as many manufacturing industries. According to Anyanwu (1979), Port Harcourt was established in 1913 because it site met the location requirements set by colonial surveyors for a port terminus - deep water near ground which connected to the mainland.

It is revealed that in 1914, a total of 7,403 labourers were engaged in railway construction work in the then prospective city and by 1944, the population grew to about 30,200 persons. This population was estimated according to Anyanwu (1979) to 34000 in 1946. The 1952- 1953 population census of Nigeria revealed the population of Port Harcourt to 179563 and was estimated to 213443 in 1970 (Port Harcourt Master Plan 1975, Ogionwo, 1979). The population figure of Port Harcourt rose to 231532 persons in 1973 and according to the national census of 1991, the municipality had a population figure of 440399. The 2006 census shows that the population increased to 1005904. Base on the growth rate as provided by the 2006 national census, by 2014, the population was estimated to 1467586 persons (Baadom, Aselemi and Kpalap, 2015). It is expected that by 2023, the population is estimated to be 1917643 persons. Sequel to the increasing population, the spatial occupation becomes scarce pushing the poor to live in the waterfront.

### **Methodology**

This paper adopts random sampling technique to arrive at basic source of primary data. A total of 21 functioning marginal lands (waterfronts) settlements were identified within Port Harcourt metropolitan city. 6 settlements representing 30% were sampled for study . 1534 households were counted in the sampled settlements, while 30% of the total households symbolizing 460 were sampled for detailed study. Questionnaires were designed, structured and administered targeting heads/ adults members of households. The collated questionnaires were analysed with emphasis on parameters such as demographic characteristics, education, employment and income, extent in participation in urban governance as well as ownership of building permit (entitlements) and availability of basic amenities.

s/n	Identified Water fronts	Sampled waterfronts	Total households	Sampled households	No. of HH		total
					M	F	
1	Nembe	Bundu	429	129	559	538	1097
2	Bundu	echue	215	65	241	214	455
3	Echue	Borokiri	294	88	380	412	792
4	Akokwa	Marine Base	153	46	185	178	363
5	Timber	Anozie	182	54	192	180	372
6	PH prison	Timber	261	78	290	295	585
7	Bille	Grand total	1534	460	1847	1817	3664
8	Okrika						
9	Okujagu						
10	Marine Base						
11	Udi						
12	Abonnema						
13	Okwelle						
14	Anozie						
15	Okwuazu						
16	Eagle island						
17	Yam zone						
18	Nepa						
19	Okwuato						
20	Borokiri						
21	Oga						

Source: Field Survey, 2024

### Findings

This section unveils demographic characteristics and environmental nature of households across the sampled waterfronts in Port Harcourt.

### Sex Ratio

The number of females for 1000 males in the sampled households appears unfavourable at 983 revealing a little difference in the sex ratio across the various settlements except in Borokiri with a total of 413 females to 380 males. The sex ratio portrays the national figure of 51% to 49% of male to female in Nigeria. The household size reveals an average of 7.9 persons per household. Though the average number varies slightly across the different marginal settlements. The table reveals an average of 8.5 in Bundu, 7.0 in Echue and 7.5 in Timber. Though, 93% of the total respondents maintained that they never obtained building permits from the local planning authority. In Rivers State, approval of building permit requires survey plan of land, land agreements, and complete building plans. It is significant to note that buildings in the urban areas without approval (permit) are regarded as illegal structures which do not require compensation for demolition.

The demolition of marginal lands has led to the displacement of thousands of residents without compensation or relocation. Sometimes, may not even be properly served with notice from appropriate authority. Displacements have affected the following settlements

**Table2: Displaced Port Harcourt Waterfronts**

S/N	Marginal lands/ waterfronts	Year of Displacement
1	Abba	2022
2	Nanka	2022
3	Agip	2002
4	Uruala	2022
5	Afikpo	2022
6	Akuzu	2022
7	Egede	2022
8	Soku	2022
9	Ojike	2022
10	Nkpogu	2021
11	Iloabuchi	2022
12	Elechi 1	2022
13	Elechi 2	2022

Source: Field Survey, 2023

In term of ownership of building, it reveals that about 175 persons representing 38% were owners of occupied properties while majority paid annually for occupation. The respondents were mostly artisans, traders, and water and road transporters as well as petty fishers found within the informal occupations (83%), while 17% were junior civil servants and factory workers who mostly walked average of 5- 8 miles to their places of work. There is significant variation in the monthly income of respondents across the surveyed settlements. The income ranges from N40,000 to N160,000. This gives an average of N100,000 per household per month. The survey reveals an average of N12,658.23 per month, an amount that is far below the over 10 years pronouncement of N18,000 minimum wage in Nigeria.

The respondents usually occupy 1-2 rooming structure mostly made of mud, wood and corrugated iron sheets as walls of the building. This may give an average of 5.0 occupancy ratio of household members. The location of the settlements as observed appear to be more than 1,000m from urban facilities like health centres, recreation ground, primary schools and markets. The settlements do not have pipe borne water (97%), but depend solely on privately drilled borehole water which they paid about N50.00 – N100.00 for 20 litres. Although, there is availability of electricity (63%), but very irregular. 28% of the respondents unveiled that electricity was cu-off from them by the appropriate authority due to inability to pay for consumption. It is significant to know that rating of payment for electricity consumption in the waterfronts of Port Harcourt does not depend on quantity of consumption rather by company’s estimation.

Household solid waste is mostly dumped and abandoned as heap. The authority does not care about such places due to inaccessibility to the collection points. However, wastes are left and sometimes used as land reclamation for future development. This situation is very identical to such settlements in developing countries especially in Africa as portrayed in the observations

of Armstrong O' Brian, Jr.. *The hut was made of corrugated metal set on a concrete pad. It was a 10- by -10 cell. Armstrong and his friends had no water (they bought it from a nearby tap owner), no toilet (the families in his compound shared a single pit latrine), and no sewers or sanitation. They did had electricity, but it was illegal service tapped from someone else's wires and could power only one feeble bulb.*

*This was Southland, a small shanty community on the western side of Nairobi, Kenya. But it could have been anywhere in the city, because more than half the city of Nairobi lives like this – 1.5 million people stuffed into mud into mud or metal or metal huts, with no services, no toilets, no rights.... Outside, a mound of garbage formed the border between Southland and the adjacent legal neighbourhood of Langata. It was perhaps 8 feet tall, 40 feet long and 10 feet wide, set in wider watery ooze. Two boys climbed the Mt. Kenya of trash. They couldn't have been more than 5 or 6 years old. They were barefoot, and with each step their toes sank into the muck, sending hundreds of flies scattering from the rancid pile. Perhaps they were playing king of the Hill. No. once atop the pile, one of the boys lowered his shorts, squatted, and defecated. The flies buzzed hungrily around his legs.*

*When 20 families- one hundred people or so- share a single latrine, a boy pooping on a garbage pile is perhaps no big thing. But it stood in jarring contrast to something Armstrong had said as we were eating – that he treasured the quality of life in his neighbourhood. For Armstrong, Southland wasn't constrained by its material conditions. Instead, the human spirit radiated out from the metal walls and garbage heaps to offer something no legal neighbourhood could: freedom.*

*Adapted from Robert Neuwirth*

According to studies conducted by UNCHS (1996), the quality and composition of wastes vary depending on the per capita income of the country. It is revealed that in the less developed nations, the average urban waste level per person in a year can be as low as 100kg, while in the developed countries, it can be as high as 1000kg. Despite low waste generation in less developed nations compared to the developed nations of the world, waste management has been multidimensional challenge. Thus, Salau (2012) maintains that the main challenge of most cities of the developing nations oftentimes was compounded by difficulties connected with collection and disposal of the huge quantities of wastes generated by households and industries. Famoroti (2008) ascertains that Lagos, believed to be one of the most populous cities, with about 17 million people generates about 9000 metric tonnes of waste daily. Also, UNCHS(1988), reveals that in many of the urban centres in the very low income countries, only between 10% and 20% of solid wastes is collected and as much as between 20% and 40% of the municipal revenues are expended on solid waste collection and management. The agencies responsible for the collection and disposal of household wastes are always faced with the problems of collection trucks being out of use because there are no spare parts since they are in most cases imported. The consequence of these problems are obvious- the smells, the diseases, pests attracted by the accumulated wastes and the overflowing drainage channels clogged with garbage. These problems are especially serious for the inhabitants of the larger and most densely populated informal or illegal settlements or tenement districts that have no regular garbage collection service since there is nowhere close –by where such wastes can be dumped (Satterthwaite, 1997; and Kulaba, 1989). The marginal (waterfronts) lands experience greater challenge in accessing infrastructure and other services. Lives in such settlements seem meaningless.

## **Conclusion**

Urban environment is generally perceived as place of comfort with attractive urban infrastructure. Urban infrastructure covers a wide range of services such as sanitation, portable water, health care, electricity, sewerage, transportation, education, employment and even security as well as livelihood housing. These collectively add to enhance quality of life of the urban dwellers and may contribute to general regional development.

However, absence of such services has resulted in urban poor especially those living in the marginal lands of Port Harcourt. Findings reveal total absence of basic urban foundations. The situation demands quick attention and remedial measures from the government. These measures actually demand long- term planning and development while the displaced are provided for and subsequently relocated.

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