



The Impacts of Urbanization on Neighbourhood Relations in Port Harcourt and its Environs

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***Abstract:** Urbanization is a process of urban expansion in space and increase in human population. It is a tool of development and civilization. However, urbanization is affiliated with gross physical, economic and social problems. One of these social issues is neighbourhood relations which constitutes the aim of this paper. Two settlements, one at the core and the other at the fringe of Port Harcourt were selected and studied. A total of 45 questionnaires were administered targeting heads of households in the studied settlements. Findings revealed that neighbourhood settlement yet to experience complete urbanization still practice high rate of social concern in terms of security, interactions and general communal living. However, the urban core neighbourhood depend completely on government institutions and agencies for security, emergencies, recreation and communication. Neighbourhood relation has been an African traditional practice with unending advantage which still needs to be inculcated in neighbourhood activities.*

Introduction

Urbanization or urban drift is the physical growth of an urban area as a result of physical, social, economic and demographic changes. Urbanization is closely linked to modernization, industrialization and the sociological process of rationalization. Urbanization therefore becomes an index of transformation from traditional rural economies to modern industrial one. It is a progressive concentration (Angotti, 1993) of population in urban unit. Urbanization is not just a process but a long term process of transformation.

According to United Nations (2005), rapid urbanization of the world's population over the twentieth century has been significant. Accordingly, the global proportion of urban population rose dramatically from 13 per cent (220 million) in 1900, to 29 per cent (732 million) in 1950, to 49 per cent (3.2 billion) in 2005. The same UN report projected that the figure is likely to rise to 60 per cent (4.9 billion) by 2030. Urbanization becomes one of the common characteristics of economic development. It is found that with the gradual growth of the economy, the process of urbanization depends on the shift of surplus population from rural to urban areas along with the growth of some industrialized urban centres. Sequel to social and economic pressures from backward rural communities, the rural residents started to migrate to the urban centres in search of job and better opportunities from the established industries, commercial activities, housing, developmental institutions and welfare programmes (Davis, 1995).

In many developing countries, it is notable that rural pressure such as poverty that drives people from that the rural areas into cities in search of employment, food, shelter and education (Singh and Sudarshan, 1996). In Africa, most people move into the urban areas because they are pushed out by factors such as poverty, environmental degradation, religious strife, political persecution, food insecurity and lack of basic infrastructure and services in the rural areas. They may still be pulled into urban areas by the advantages and opportunities of the city including education, electricity, water, etc (Dutta and Pradham, 1998). Even though in many African countries, the urban areas offer few jobs for the youth, they are often attracted there by the amenities of urban life (Tarver, 1996).

Rural migration to the urban centres may not only be responsible only be responsible to urbanization of the urban centres but natural growth. Natural population increase (high births than death) is one of the significant factors in the growth of cities in the developing countries. The natural increase is trickled by improved medical care, better sanitation and improved food supplies, which reduce death rates and cause populations to grow.

The increase urbanization has not only led to a number of socio-economic problems like crime, suicides, drug abuse, unemployment and poverty, alcoholism, overcrowding,, housing shortage, traffic control, slums and pollution but social changes especially in urban neighbourhoods.

Urban neighbourhoods like any other neighbourhoods possess identify characteristics in terms of communal life, relations and values. Neighbourhood values or neighbourliness is not peculiar to any region. It has its existence virtually in all nations. Thus, people tend to form communities and communal living patterns since the early ages of humanity for practical, economic, sociological and psychological reasons (Berk, 2005).

Practically, the concept of neighbourhood unit is traceable to the industrial revolution (Ademola, 2015). Accordingly, the concept was developed as a response to degradation of the city environment sequel to high congestion, heavy traffic movement through the city, insecurity to school-going children, distant location of shopping and recreation activities, among others (Greer, 2008). According to Ademola (2015), the conception of neighbourhood was to create a safe and healthy physical environment in which children will have no traffic streets to cross on their way to school. It is ascertained that neighbourhood school should be located within walking distance of children to the school while women should have easy walking distance to shopping and residents to recreation ground.

The neighbourhood concept as applied to physical form, was first specified by Perry C.A (1872-1944) (Greer, 2008) to describe a populated area that support an elementary school with an enrolment of between 1000 and 1200 pupils. This would mean a population of between 5,000 and 6,000 people. According to Ademola (2015), the neighbourhood unit should be bounded by arterial roads or other boundaries, with open spaces, school, community centre and local shops. Most importantly, there should be no thorough traffic with the neighbourhood unit. The first conscious application and recognition of the neighbourhood as a basic unit in the urban planning was the settlement house movement which began in London about 1885. According to Keller (1968), most definitions of neighbourhood involve two general components: the physical and the social. More specifically, the basic elements of a neighbourhood are people, place, interaction system, shared identification, and public symbols. Schwirian (1983), therefore defines a neighbourhood as a population residing in an indefinable section of a city whose members are organized into a general interaction network of formal and

informal ties and express their common identification with the area in public symbols. Sociologically, a neighbourhood is distinguished from residential area due to the extent of social organization among residents of the neighbourhood. The degree of social interaction may to a significant extent depend on the availability of physical elements which are shared in common. Such elements include schools, shops, recreation ground and community hall. These elements enhance sustainability of neighbourhood and promote neighbourhood relations. Thus, neighbourhood can be classified into natural and social areas. The different types of neighbourhoods contribute to neighbourhood interaction and relations. According to Suttles (1972), the face block is the most basic form of city neighbourhood. This consists of the immediate resident whose dwellings share common egress and who use the same local facilities on a regular basis. Neighbourhood tends to defend itself as organization against social changes. The defended neighbourhood has certain identified population which share fate at the hands of the city and its key elements of operations. Thus, residents of defended neighbourhood are more willing than other neighbourhood dwellers to collectively act to defend its social structure and organization against changes (Goodwin, 1979). These changes are initiated by external influences which subsequently break the social structure of neighbourhoods. Focusing on urbanization/disorganization of Wirth (1938), Fischer (1976) argues that as cities grow and become more complex, the older forms of social control, such as the family, neighbourhood, and primary groups, lose their importance. Thus, secondary and formal organizations take over many of the functions of kin and neighbour. The urbanization hypothesis unveils neighbourhood change as a decline in the importance of the locality group. There are several theoretical perspectives on neighbour relationship change which certainly define the different forms of neighbourhood. These perspectives are elements of urbanization. These include demography, socio-economic status, cultural/racial influence, housing provision and expansion as well as institutional development.

Methodology

This study involves two different residential neighbourhoods with the basic objective of assessing the extend of urbanization on neighbourhood relations. The areas are the New Government Residential Area which is regarded as high income area and is located at the central point of Port Harcourt metropolitan city. The second is Akpajo – Eleme traditional settlement that is currently experiencing marginal urbanization. The Akpajo settlement is located at the fringe of Port Harcourt. Households were randomly selected from each of the case studies. A total of 45 questionnaires were administered targeting heads of household members. The study focused on level of urbanization on relationship in terms of security, neighbourhood meetings, children interactions and aids.

Case Studies

Case 1: New GRA – High Income Level

the New Government Residential Area of Port Harcourt is a settlement designed for high income earners. The residents are mainly serving and retired Class I officers from federal and state government institutions, captains of industries, first class entrepreneurs and major contractors. A total of 15 households were selected and head or adult members of households were questioned with same questionnaire at same period of time. It is found that neighbouring within this high income residential area is formal as 14 out of the 15 total respondents signifying 93.3% revealed that they never involve in any degree of emotional place. Emotional place indeed involves daily concern in forms of calls and physical visitations. To them, a good

neighbour is somebody friendly in emergencies and with minor things and ready to express sympathy during emergency and unexpected situations. However, it is ascertained in this study that 100% of the respondents unveiled that all kind of emergencies are met with the help of security network system especially police and fire service. The study maintains that 12 out of the 15 total respondents symbolizing 80% unveiled that when there is an occasion of festival or gathering, which is an inevitable part in Nigerian socio-cultural system especially in the Niger Delta, then the residents usually will never gather and celebrate as a whole. This accordingly does not mean that there are clashes of identification in any form within the neighbourhood. It is observed that diminished dependency in the high residential neighbourhood of New Government Residential Area of Port Harcourt leads to a balance between mutual aid and respecting privacy.

However, positive neighbour relations providing mutual help, commitment, care and expression of concern among neighbours is declining in degree due to privatization of lifestyle. Also, it is visible that neighbourhood relations have fully moved from public families as practised in traditional African culture to public anonymous. In most cases 74% confirmed that they did not know who is residing next three doors since they do not have anything in common which is absolute anonymity. It is found that social interaction network is highly formal as every household keeps to its boundary thereby portraying that physical proximity is not counting any kind and does not matter. The study reveals that residence association meeting does not hold. Relatively, all residents fall within same socio-economic strata. Children are not usually free to walk to a common playground if any, but rather, enjoy in house and outside built-up space within the plot for recreation. It is there observed that socialization of the children is not involved with the neighbouring relations but rather only within school and television programmes.

Study 2: Akpajo – Urban Village

This residential neighbourhood is a traditional village settlement but currently engulfed by urbanization. It consists of relatively equal number of traditional residents (indigenes) and migrants. The settlement socially operates in these mixed capacities. Sequel to the complexity in the nature of the settlement, a total of 30 households were interviewed and observed targeting a balance of 15 each for migrants and traditional settlers. The study reveals that 28 out of the 30 total respondents representing 93.3% revealed that traditional rulers as well as neighbourhood and compound chiefs and elders intervened and settle almost all manners of conflicts. Most security matters are handled by the neighbourhood youths (85%). There is extremely high degree of neighbourhood relations as traditional family members live at close proximity (87%). Family ties enhance sharing and giving out of any commodity including salt, pepper and even lighting materials when needed. Emergency situations are generally shared and addressed. It is ascertained that parents and children come out in the evening to share night tale stories in common as confirmed by 68% of the residents. The common social traits among the traditional settlers also affect the migrant who abide and practice same life style. There exist family, compound and neighbourhood meetings. These gathering according to about 73% revealed that they contribute money and express concern for members and even non-members. Despite that members of various income groups more especially middle and low income dominate the neighbourhood, there is no disparity but collective concern for one another. Traditional African practices of neighbourhood still exist among dwellers of this neighbourhood. Children who are residing in this area usually come together day and evening

to play within neighbourhood playground and available spaces in the compound. Socialization of children and young people in this settlement is extremely high and neighbouring relations is high.

Conclusion

Neighbourhood relations traditionally existed with the intention of natural bonds among people. These relationships play dominant roles in the physical, social and economic development of human society. Relationship in terms of neighbourliness have always been portrayed in aspects of security and aids for one another. However, neighbourhood relations have obviously changed and appear not of great significance anymore. It is rapidly losing its importance especially in the urban areas where urbanization and industrialization bring about changes accompanying with impacts in all ramifications. Urbanization tends to reduce high level of neighbourhood relations. People in the urban neighbourhoods seem to have different means of socialization while those yet to experience urbanization maintain high degree of human concern.

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