

Urban Egalitarianism: The Way Forward to Ensure Sustainable Urban Design, Practice and Development in Developing Countries (The Nigerian Case)

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The North American Conference on Sustainability, Energy & the Environment 2014
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Cities and urban development across the world are entities with high complexity, most especially with the unavoidable ever increasing population which incorporates human diversity in culture, wealth and status. However, rapid urbanization and expansion is today a common phenomenon in many developing countries across the world, this is often characterized by challenges such as slum generation, informality, segregation and unequal distribution of infrastructure and resources among neighborhoods in the cities. Cities in developing nations have continued to grow in fragmentations, making their growth much more than the eyes can see, and the ears can hear and varieties of view-points wanting to be explored in great depth.

In tackling this urban menace, sustainability and urban transformation through policies and strategies seem to be the major focus and agenda among many urban development stakeholders globally. With this development, the environmental and economic sphere of sustainability have been granted higher priority over their social counterpart. However, the key question remains; “who and which group of people” benefit from these new urban spaces which have been proposed or created. Cities and urban spaces are meant to serve their citizenry irrespective of their class and status in the society, a situation where every individual is incorporated and engaged in the decision making and developmental process of the space in which they exist. In achieving this sustainable development and practice goals, this paper presents various integrated approach in which ‘community and neighborhood’ should be placed at the center of sustainability analysis and the discussion of spatial connectivity through urban design, development and practice with cases from Nigerian cities of Lagos and Abuja.

Keywords: sustainability, urban development, segregation, spatial connectivity

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Introduction

Discussions on the attainments of sustainable urban development and practice has continued to received global recognition, and has remained a major focus among many academic and policy makers circle. These developments have been attributed to the inevitable ever increasing global population and its substantial variability in different regions across the world (UN- Habitat, 2014b). Statistics has reviewed that more than half of the world's population today are concentrated in urban centers across the globe, and these has continued to experience a dramatic increase from 30% in 1950 to 54% in 2014 (UN- Habitat, 2014b). This current statistics concerning the world's population growth and urbanization is also projected to increase by 66% by 2050, making urbanization one of the most challenging issues facing humanity (UNDP, 2006 UN-Habitat, 2014b)

Cities as an engine of development are noted for their complexity and related issues of size, perception, activities, culture and status, but remains homes to multitude of users which have continuously attracted various level of urbanization. For instance, urban population variation across the world have continuously increased by 82% in North America, 80% in Latin America and the Caribbean, 73% in Europe, 40 % in Africa and 48 % in Asia (UN-Habitat, 2014b). In addition, further changes are expected to emerge with major concentration and fastest urbanization growth rate in developing nations across Africa with projections of 56% and Asia with 64% respectively by 2050 (UN-Habitat, 2014b).

In view of this demographic facts, various international forums and reports have recognized both positive and negative benefits associated with urban developmental growth, this ranges from the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Report) in the 1980s to The Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in (2012). These forums established the fact that urban development and planning is integrally connected to the three sphere of sustainability: economic, social and environmental. They also highlighted the opportunities of urban growth as that which contribute to economic activities through employment opportunities, commerce and productivity, while serving as the hub that links rural areas and international borders leading into the enormous migration of population (UN- Habitat, 2006, 2007a). However, it is significant to note that the reverse can also be the case with its negative impacts as that which threatens sustainable development such as the intense pressure on existing infrastructural development and public service of energy, water, sanitation, housing and health facilities. Also, are elements of rising inequalities and unequitable share of resources, the inability to manage urban expansion resulting in environmental impacts and sub-standard living conditions (Olotua, 2010).

However, urban sustainability agenda on the global stage have continued to prepare cities for future development in accordance with the benchmark set by the World Commission on Environment and Development (The Brutland Report). This report emphasized the necessity to “meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987). In addition, subsequent actions are underway such as the planned Third United Nations Conference on Human Settlement (Habitat III) for the year (2016). With this development, further discussions and reports are envisioned towards global

urban sustainability with the aim of deriving new models for urban development and the promotion of equity, welfare, and shared prosperity in this fast rising urban world (UN Habitat, 2014a). However this is important as the recent transformation of cities in developing nations have their national government focusing on economic indicators, the image of its cities, as well as the amount of foreign investors its urban development can attract with a limited attention on the final impact on the larger urban population. Cities and their elements both moving and stationary are perceived differently by its dwellers, as such conveying an image, memory or meaning (Lynch, 1960). In support of this position, this paper presents 'egalitarianism' in the context of urban development and planning as a trend that is required by urban policy makers and stakeholders to actualize a sustainable urban development and practice in developing nations.

Urban Transformation in Developing Nations

In recent years, developing nations have experienced a major transformation in its urban developmental outlook, most importantly from the start of the new millennium year (2000). However, various sustainability reports have identified the important need to recognize and respond to these changes by providing new approaches to tackle any challenges synonymous to urbanization (UN- Habitat 2010, Dixon, 2011). According to demographic statistics *from State of African Cities* (2014), there are over 28 megacities with 453 million dwellers across the world with the fastest growing cities emerging in developing nations with a significant transformation in socio-political, demographical, economical, and technological terms. For instance, Tokyo is today the world 's largest city with an agglomeration of 38 million inhabitants, Delhi with 25 million, Shanghai with and Mexico city 23 million, Lagos, Mumbai and Sao Paulo, each with around 21 million inhabitants all in developing nations (Campbell 2012, UN-Habitat, 2014b).

This urban transitional period has also been historical, most significantly with the advent of the year (2007) which marked the first time in the history of humanity with half of the world's population living in cities. For developing countries, these urban transitional periods have posed numerous urban social and environmental challenges for many of its dwellers, with many of this cities transforming into informal urban expansion, slum formation, urban disintegration and segregation with the neglect of the larger population becoming a common phenomenon. UN Habitat (2010) presented the current state of urban form in many cities in developing nations as that which is developing in two separate 'contrasting' urban developmental patterns. One that is symbolized by poverty, informality, exclusion, and poor quality living environment with little or no infrastructure and services to support the well-being of its inhabitants, and the other with gated communities that is exclusive, formal with more than enough infrastructures and services.

This current urban menace provided a platform for many urban development and sustainability experts to debate on the future of urban planning in developing nations with an objective to meet the demands of the inhabitants and also protect the general environments of this transformed cities (UN-Habitat, 2014). In acknowledgement of this position, the UN-Habitat report on the State of Cities in Developing Countries through an exploratory analysis of the current state and general environment in the cities of Shenyang and Wuhan in China, New Delhi in India, Port Harcourt and

Lagos in Nigeria and Meuraxa in Indonesia all in developing countries as that which lacks the ability to tackle its current challenges characterized by the problems of management, exclusion, inequality, insecurity and environmental degradation; let alone provide solutions for future occurrence. UN-Habitat (2009, 2010) also identified the non-existence of an adequate urban governance policy, participatory urban planning, and the lack of institutional capacity and the high rate of inequality among the different socio-economic population strata as the major factors which has deterred the attainment of sustainable urban development in many developing cities.

In addition, cities in developing nations have urban planning and operational process that is still largely based on the colonial laws in-terms of land tenure systems with regulatory decrees that are one- sided in developmental terms which largely support, protects and tailored made in the interest of the rich or capitalist over that of the urban poor (Aribisala, 2013). Consequently, in the verge of attaining the status of world-class cities, modern urban culture and pattern have been adopted with majority of the planning policies being imported from the developed nations. Examples of this development includes The Eko Atlantic project in Lagos and The Abuja Centenary City which are designed and described as smart modern city which synchronizes the demand of tomorrow's society with a sustainable ecological and socially responsible manner. A springboard and controlling liver for Nigeria's economy and an African epic center of global economic activity where modern beauty will merge with architectural creativity in creating an environment that is alive and productive (Olesin 2013, Adetayo 2014). However many have also argued against the creation of these modern development as that which support spatial segregation, population control and are limited to beautification and decoration of the urban space while the majority of the urban population are evicted without a relocation or compensation plan.



Land reclamation for the Eko Atlantic Project Lagos, Nigeria.
Source: Eko Atlantic <http://www.ekoatlantic.com/media/image-gallery/>

Indeed, it is important to ask the key question of how sustainable is this present urban planning practice, and if these current city development provides adequate solutions to the current urban challenge being faced in many cities in developing countries. According to Lynch (1960) who argued that not only is the city an object to be perceived, but remains a product of many builders that is constantly modified to suit

their purpose. However Allen (2009) thoughts concerning urban planning policies is that which is determine by the viability of any given practice, policy or trend ‘for or against’ any urban sustainability, as it is important to reflect on its relationship with all spheres of sustainability (economic, social, environmental) of the built environment. As such, the sustainability of any city depends on its capacity and the livability of all city dwellers through an efficient urban infrastructure and built environment. In recognition of this position, urban planning and practice have been recognized by the World Urban Campaign as the instrument which determines the sustainability of any city by the promotion of a participatory engagement, strategic thinking, vision building and territorial coordination which must be clearly understood in the context of the area been examined (UN-WUF, 2004). Reports from the Second and Third World Urban Forum in Barcelona and Vancouver (2004, 2006) reinvented the functions of urban planning and practice with wide acceptance and a consensus from planning experts and stakeholders with the establishment of the 10 principles:

- The promotion of sustainable development
- Achieving integrated planning
- Integrate planning with budget
- Planning with partners and stakeholders
- Meeting the subsidiary principles
- Ensuring accessibility to land promoting
- Market responsiveness
- Developing appropriate planning tools
- Be pro-poor and inclusive
- Recognition of cultural diversity.

Many researchers and built environments experts during this forum emphasized the need to continuously update urban planning process and policies of cities, as they remain the key instruments to bridge the gap between the two urban groups of the rich and the poor as well as achieving inclusive, participatory and culturally meaningful cities.

Sustainability and Urban Planning Process

The concept and definition for sustainability have been presented from both implicit and explicit characterization by various references and reports. An implicit characterization of sustainable urban planning from the perspective of showing higher priority or concern for a particular or some aspect of sustainability over the other (Holland 1995, Dillard et al, 2009, Pole'se & Stren 2000). Further explicit view-point has also been offered with the derivation of an appropriate solution from a broader perspective of enumerating all aspects of sustainability that is vital (Lombardi & Basden, 1997). However, international forums on sustainability agenda have continued to present a holistic structure to harmonize the diverse interest towards sustainable planning and design for cities (WCED 1987, UNCHS 1996, LCSEC 2007, UNCSD, 2012). This integrated approach unifies all interest in urban developmental procedures with the need to ensure an inclusive and participatory process that involves all stakeholders in the determination of the built environment and also the livelihood of its inhabitants from a long-term approach.

Planning procedures plays a vital role in urban development designs and formation through an outlined analysis and evaluation of all current and eventuated challenges on the basis of real world case studies and planning examples. In support of this argument, the global report on Human Settlement (2009) identified series of factors which impacts on the current state of the sustainable urban and living conditions of many city dwellers across the world. This include demographic challenge in the case of rapid urbanization as previously stated, democratization opportunities through the awareness of social and economic rights, economic challenge and its connection with the uncertainty of future economic growth, and social and spatial inequality resulting in urban sprawl and informal urbanization. In reference to this challenges, urban planning fundamentals urge to be reinvented by concerned stakeholders whereby the new imperatives and demand on policies and strategies are derived with an appropriate solution through contextualized information, communication tools, with an inclusive modelling method been finalized by design and implementation. Urban planning and practice of 21st century cities must also transform these key challenges into opportunities by creating cities that work for all its citizenry in- respective of their status by:

Tackling Informality Instead of Contrasting It

The form of any city is largely determined by its urban development and practice; this is evident with the current state of transformation been experienced in many cities across developing nations. Cities such as Lagos, Abuja and Nairobi among many others have urban practices and developments characterized by contrasting neighborhood settings (UN-Habitat, 2014a). The wide gap between various class and social strata in the society remains a major factor that influences urban divide, exclusion, and contrasting neighborhood settings in many of these cities. However, UN- Habitat (2010) identified the enforcement of negative regulatory laws as a control mechanism been utilized to tackle urban informality at all cost in cities in developing countries, which was also argued to be a major factor leading into acquisition and sub-division. Many urban dwellers in these regions of the world are subjected to high level of rejection and neglect, as the level of inequality has continued to rise without much concern and attention from policy makers and city developers with supportive strategies in the provision of an inclusive city for all (UN-Habitat, 2014a).

In achieving an inclusive urban space, effective urban planning developmental practice can be utilized as a tool to achieve the much anticipated inclusion as well as reverse the trend of informality and the growth in slum development. However it is significant to note that the transformation for better outcomes does not happen automatically, as appropriate policies that support the needs and living conditions of the urban poor must be implemented with emphasis on the importance of every individual and their community. This creates a balance between urban growth and sustainability with key elements such as the restructuring of institutions, equity in resource allocation, leadership re-development and political vision and value as well as effective implementation and monitoring. UN-Habitat (2010) also identified the strategic use of planning tools through improved urban governance as a critical element in tackling contrasting neighborhoods. It is also considered as the foundation for urban planning approach that is switched from a 'command and control' model to that which incorporates an inclusive and participatory process. This can become a

reality by first providing a strategic plan for the equal provision of infrastructure guided by land development or land re-adjustment as a possible solution to an upgrade for informal settlements. Urban planning process must be participatory through meaningful and collective engagement with the involvement of the general public in all the decision making process, implementation and monitoring. Secondly, the collaboration between private and public sector, community based groups, and international development partners must also be encouraged as an avenue which can strengthen the legitimacy of planning and regulatory system with the aim of achieving progress through adequate standards and regulations. Thirdly, legislative and policy framework through institutional processes are vital procedures in achieving sustainable cities and spatial planning. This facilitate the intersectional coordination and position urban planning at the intersection of public policy and resource allocation For instance, in the case of cities such as Kisumu, Kenya's third largest city, where data gathering process and surveys provided planners with an up-date information concerning the needs of the residents with the utilization of a city-wide Geographic Information System to ensure the effective planning for their slums (UN-Habitat, 2014a). Through this, urban planning becomes tools for local democracy and inclusive governance which responds to the needs of the city dwellers rather than regulates it. Furthermore, participatory planning empowers communities with an outcome of a better spatial design that is responsive to the needs of different urban groups which obviously impacts on the quality of life.

Urban Development and the Quality of Life for All

The term 'quality of life' for city dwellers across the world has often been discussed, debated with various interpretations and meaning in response to urban developmental challenges. In the desire to interpret the urban quality of life concept in a particular place, person or group, many research and report have based their ideology of the quality of life on human satisfaction with different elements of cost and living conditions with access to basic goods, service, infrastructure and public amenities (UN- Habitat, 2012/2013). Also identified are the equity and respect for diversity and cultural identities, and land use pattern within local level with an objective of meeting the diversity of needs and expectation of the citizenry (UN- Habitat 2012/2013, Haman Serag et al 2013). According to Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen, the quality of life of an individual is determined by various opportunities open to such person and their freedom to choose from these many opportunities (UN Habitat, 2012/2013). As such, Haman Serag et al (2013) further presented the view point that urban quality of life is a multi-dimensional concept which is analyzed in accordance to place and societies. Using this perspective, he also argued that the urban quality of life cannot be understood from one view point, but that which incorporates over dimensions that are inter-related and dependent on each other. Seven main dimensions were identified as that which contributes to the realization of any urban quality of life, these are:

- **The physical:** This takes into account the sustainability of the urban fabric, through planning, provision and management of the city layout, services and infrastructure.
- **The social:** The promotion of social justice, equity and interaction for urban dwellers to interact with the access to the freedom of choice while participating actively in their respective communities.

- **Psychological:** The creation of an urban environment that recognize opinions of every citizen in-terms of identity and sense of place.
- **Economic :** The creation of an urban space as a place for activities that support human development through job creation and the promotion of local business opportunities while encouraging mixed use development.
- **Political:** The democratization of urban policies that promotes integration with the involvement of every stakeholder in the community in decision making.
- **Mobility:** This focus on accessibility and transportation issues with the provision of a network interconnecting streets through friendly pedestrian and cycle pathway to reduce traffic load, minimize air pollution and also encourage walking.
- **Environment:** The provision of natural landscaped natural green area distributed equally within every neighborhood in an urban area.

Haman Serag et al (2013) argument on sustainable urban development identified the improvement of the quality of life of every citizenry as vital in any sustainability agenda with the emergence of new urban planning theories such as new urbanism, smart growth, urban village and intelligent urbanism. These urban theories further promoted the urban quality of life concept with the consideration of the seven identified dimensions in the design of buildings, neighborhoods and cities that focus on the sense of community and place, along with people's needs and well-being.

In recent times, efforts have also shifted from the definition to the measurement of quality of life with a presumed argument that individuals are the best judges of their life conditions by providing relevant information about a crucial component of social change through values, beliefs, and the motivation of the ordinary citizen (Haman Serag, et al 2013).

However, quality of life underpins the functionality of any city which its notion is at the crossroad of all policies and actions. For instance, human development capacity and economic growth of a city is enhanced by means of empowerment of its citizens through the equal and accessible opportunities been provide. Also the improvement of the quality of life and living condition for every urban dweller is largely based on the urban planning and design process which is vital in the provision of adequate infrastructure and services of public transport, housing, public space, and drainage system to support the well-being of every citizenry. According to the UN- Habitat Survey (2011), this identified security, human right, and housing with basic facilities as well as employment with a decent salary as the most important factors. In view of these positions, it is obvious that the quality of life of every group in an urban development is an essential element in the determination of how sustainable a city can be, which has made the fulfillment of needs and well-being a burning issue globally.

Urban Politicking in Nigerian Cities

Urbanization rate in Nigerian cities is one of the highest in the world couple with the demographic fact of being the most populous black nation on earth, with an urban development pattern that takes the form of a central core with peripheral area that are suburban with peri-urbanization (UN-Habitat, 2014b). Recent economic growth in Nigeria with its emergence as Africa's largest economy in 2014 is marked with trends

of imported developmental models of revitalization, renewal and redevelopment in its urban growth (Dobbs, 2014).



IMF National Statistic on Biggest Sub-Saharan Economies

Source: The Economist: <http://www.economist.com/news/finance-and-economics/21600734-revised-figures-show-nigeria-africas-largest-economy-step-change>.

This initiative have recorded both successes and failures from various quarters of the society, one with creative and ambitious development that focus on certain class of groups in the society with a strong political and economic tool to secure foreign investment, promote international attention and indeed signaling a new economic awakening and pride for the country (Adetayo, 2014). While the other is the promotion of urban development away from the major population concentration, with a disconnection driven by negative policies and control system leading into subdivision, segregation, forced eviction and social inequity (Bean, 2011). The community power structure of Nigerian cities is that which the business and elicit group determine and regulate all the major urban planning decisions on behalf of millions of other city inhabitants (Aribisala, 2013).

The implication of this divergent circumstance in shaping urban development outcome is evident in the current urban development and practice of Lagos, Port-Harcourt and Abuja in Nigeria. Discussions from the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development established the need of achieving an equilibrium in global urban development with an integrated equitable delivery and access to land, housing, basic services and infrastructures. In creating such equilibrium in the context of Nigeria's urban development and practice, it is important to first examine the objectives of the current urban policies and development with the key question of to 'whose advantage and benefits' are the current developmental policies and plan. As such, there exists a complex sociological problem of trying to strike equilibrium between the power groups in the society and among other groups. According to Branne (1956), in the attempt to operate a planning machinery in a society with a kind of balancing scale between the state and the individual, the major challenge remains how to maintain an 'equilibrium' in which all goals through its planning process must be geared towards. For instance in the case of Lagos, West African commercial hub and Africa's largest city with an estimated population of 21 million residents, the planning and regulatory efforts of the city authority have been routinely thwarted by economic and political intervention (Olesin,2013). Hence,

suggesting a capitalist undertone leading to a highly unequal urban divide segregated by class and social strata. A typical case is the example of the forced eviction and destruction of urban slum and informal settlements such as Makoko, and Badia both slum community on the edge of Lagos. Various reports and publications have argued that the eviction exercise was not aimed at achieving sustainable development for Lagos, but was undertaken as a result of the increase in land value and its proximity to highbrow neighborhoods areas of Victoria Island, Ikoyi and Lekki, while paving way to planned communities with adequate infrastructures far beyond the reach of the initial occupiers and settlers (Bean, 2011).

The Makoko Saga

Makoko, a fishing community which consist of dozens of stilt structures built over Lagos lagoon is habituated by very poor urban dwellers struggling to contain a rapidly expanding population (Bean, 2011). This slum settlement provides its residents with shelter to live and work with the lagoon serving as the main source of livelihood from the sale of fish to the rest of the city of Lagos. However, the government of Lagos has unfortunately identified the growth of this neighborhood as illegal and dangerous, as the unhealthy environment continuously expands causing water contamination and flooding as a result of the lack of sanitation and waste management.



Makoko Lagos Lagoon Slum Development

Source: BBC News: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-18872929>

The Lagos city urban development administration commenced the demolition of Makoko following a 72 hours advance notice of eviction with more than 30,000 residents evicted and displaced into a worse living condition with no assistance for relocation (Beski, 2012). Argument in support of the slum clearing action by the government was an effort to clean up Lagos, as the unwholesome structures constitute an ‘environmental nuisance’, security risk, an impediment to the economic and gainful utilization of the waterfront. In addition, Makoko was also identified as a slum that is easily visible from the Third Mainland Bridge which connects Lagos mainland to the city’s rich and business districts, and its scenery does not represent Lagos as a true emerging world class city in positive light (Bean 2011, Adeoye 2012, Fortin 2012, Beski, 2012).

The Abuja Land Swap Concept

In tackling the challenges of rapid urbanization in the city of Abuja most importantly with the provision of public infrastructure, new policy of land swap concept was initiated by the Abuja urban development authority with an objective to ensure comprehensive development of districts in line with the Abuja master-plan and also generate secondary investment (Ibezim-Ohaeri, 2013). This concept awards large hectares of greenfield lands to competent private developers for the provision of public infrastructure. More specifically, the land swap initiative is to give an investor a particular percentage of land in a district in exchange for the provision of infrastructure earmarked for the district. According to Abuja city development authority, the land swap initiative have presented an incentivized solution to the persisting urban challenge characterized by pressure on existing infrastructure and the lack of funds with the primary objective of fast- tracking housing and infrastructural development. However majority of Abuja urban dwellers in the concerned satellite towns and villages have argued that the 'land swap initiative' lacks an inclusive participatory process in its formation, as aggrieved indigenous communities fault the public private partnership model as that which excludes the involvement of the communities in the redevelopment intervention. In addition, there are concerns that the contractual relationship between the Federal Capital Development Authority (FCDA) and private developers does not outline community roles and benefits under the project (Ibezim-Ohaeri, 2013). Hence, making the continued existence of the original settlers and owners of the land in the transformed neighborhood a dream that will may never come through.

Conclusion

The connection between an urban space and its occupants cannot be overemphasized as 'equality and justice' is required in Nigeria's urban development as the framework where communal engagement and collaboration occurs in creating sustainable urban development, rather than solving a challenge with the emergence of another.

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