# URBANIZATION AND THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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*Abstract*

*Urbanization is one of the most widespread phenomenal issues in many developing countries.According to the Nigeria National Economic Empowerment Development (NEED) strategy document (2004), the rate of urbanization is one of the fastest in the world. The high urban growth rate in Nigeria poses some socio-economic and environmental consequences leading to unsustainable development. Sustainable urban development has become a global challenge as many urban authorities especially in the developing countries are grappling with limited human and material resources on how to tackle the numerous urban problems. This paper examined some of the challenges of urbanization and sustainable development in Nigeria. It examined unemployment and poverty, urban health problems, housing condition and environmental issues of urbanization in the country. It was discovered that none of the issues has attended a sustainable level. The Nigerian city therefore is far from achieving sustainable development. Recommendations were made for some of the urban strategies for achieving sustainable urban development in the country.*
*Keywords: Urbanization, Sustainable and Urban development.*

Introduction:

Urbanization involves an increase in the proportion of people living in urban areas. Although the process began in the fourth millennium BC, the number of people living in urban areas formed until recently, only a small proportion of a country's population. One estimate suggests that in 1800 only 3% of the world's population were urban dwellers, a figure that has risen according to the latest UN-2008 to 50% and which is predicted to rise to 60% before 2025.

Simultaneous with urbanization has been the growth of large cities. Whereas the only cities in the world with a population exceeding one million in 1900 were London and Paris, the UN estimates that in 1950 it had risen to 70 and in 2005 to 410. Of these cities, most of which are in developing countries, 48 had a population of more than 5 million with the so-called mega cities exceeding 10 million. This phenomenon of urbanization is increasing in both the developed and developing countries as a result of social, economic, cultural, technological and political developments that lead to the concentration and growth of cities. However, rapid urbanization, particularly the growth of large cities and the associated problems of

unemployment, poverty, poor sanitation, inadequate health, urban slum and environmental degradation pose formidable challenges in many developing countries and Nigeria in particular.

The most serious problems confronting cities and their inhabitants as identified in Agenda 21 (1996) include the following: inadequate financial resources, lack of employment opportunities, spreading homelessness and expansion of squatter settlements, increasing poverty and a widening gap between the rich and poor, growing insecurity and rising crime rates, inadequate and deteriorating housing stock, service and infrastructure. Others include lack of health and educational facilities, improper land use, insecure land tenure, rising traffic congestion, increasing pollution, lack of green space, inadequate water supply and sanitation, uncoordinated urban development and an increasing vulnerability to disaster. All these problems have seriously challenged the capacity of government at all levels to realize socio-economic development and environmental protection, which are all components of sustainable development.

Available data reveal that Nigeria has been experiencing an accelerated rate of urbanization; this rapid rate of urbanization has led to several challenges and problems similar to situations in other parts of the world. The problems identified in Agenda 21 are prevalent in Nigeria. Today's Nigerian city, according to Mabogunje (2002) is typified by substandard and inadequate housing, slums, and lack of infrastructural facilities, transportation problems, low productivity, poverty, crime and juvenile delinquency. Urbanization, according to him is the root cause of the high rates of environmental degradation, pollution and social delinquency. Of the 177 countries of the world, Nigeria ranks 151 on the Human Development Index (HDR, 2004).

Various scholars have studied the challenges of sustainable and urban development in Nigeria. Some of them include Falade (1999) whose study focused in the challenges of sustainable Nigeria, Abumere (2002) whose research centered on urban governance and the challenges of urban poverty; Odeyami (2002) who did a study on gender and urbanization and Olanrewaju (2003) who focused on sustainability and urban poverty. This paper however, focuses on urban development and sustainability in Nigeria. The study examines the concept of sustainable development, the challenges of urban development and sustainability in Nigeria in order to propose some meaningful solutions.

**The Concept of Sustainable Development.**

The United Nation defines sustainable development as the efforts to improve present living standards in ways that will not jeopardize those of future generations. The concern is that the present use of resources should be in such a way that it does not lead to the destruction, pollution and degradation of the earth materials which may be depriving future generations of the resources they will need for their well-being. The idea of sustainability hopes to promote more environmentally and socially friendly development for all, especially for the vast

majority of the earth's people who do not yet enjoy an acceptable level of well-being.

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs(WCED,1987). The primary objective of sustainable development is to reduce the absolute poverty of the world's poor through lasting and secure livelihoods that minimize resource depletion, environmental degradation, cultural disruption and social instability.

The earth summit (UNCED), which took place in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, recognized the pressing environment and development problems of the world and through the adoption of Agenda 21, produced a global programme of action for sustainable development in the 21$^{st}$ century. Agenda 21 stresses the importance of partnerships in improving social, economic and environmental quality in urban areas. It suggests renewed focus on effective land use planning to include adequate environmental infrastructure, water, sanitation, drainage, transportation and solid waste management, in addition to a sound social infrastructure capable of alleviating hunger. According to Afonja (1999), the Earth Summit broadened environmental issues and emphasized the synergies with other social and economic policy issues. The 1997 session of the UN general Assembly set a target date 2002, for the formulation and elaboration of national strategies for sustainable development. Nation governments are to integrate environmental, economic and social objectives into decision-making by either elaborating new policies or strategies for sustainable development, or by adapting existing policies and plans. It also reaffirmed that all sectors of the society should be involved in their development and implementation. The world summit for sustainable development (WSSD), held in August 2002, urged in its plan of Implementation that nations should take step to make progress in the formulation and elaboration of national strategies for sustainable development and begin their implementation (UNDESA, 2004). Although sustainable development is considered desirable by many people, it is still a concept that is being refined, and no country or organization has yet devised a workable policy.

**Sustainability and Urbanization**

The world is fast experiencing urbanization. In 1700, less than 10 percent of the worlds' total population lived in cities. Only 5 of those cities had populations as high as several hundred thousand people. By 2003, 47 percent of the world's population lived in cities. By 2004, there were more than 400 cities of over 1 million and more than 24cities with 10 million. Although many people anticipate enjoying city life, it is the elusive idea of life in a modern, wealthy city that they cherish. Most urban dwellers today cope with far more difficult realities.

Housing, sanitation, waste management, unemployment, and lack of basic infrastructures are cases in point. In rapidly growing cities in Asia, Africa and Latin America, housing stock is always in short supply and substandard while basic sanitation system are absent. In many cities, working toilets are in short supply, and desperate citizens relieve themselves in poorly drained pit toilets or on city streets.

Sewage and other waste water is often pumped into a nearby river, swamp, drains and roadsides. Solid waste is littered on the streets, open spaces and drainage channels. These methods of waste disposal cause serious health hazards to the urban inhabitants and widespread environmental damage. Technology and other advances will no doubt help alleviate some of these problems, but we are now far short of the sustainable ideal for the world's cities.

## CHALLENGES OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

The Human Development Report (2004) records that 45.9% of the 120.9 million (2002) reside in urban centers. According to Mabogunje (2002), residents of Nigeria in 1950 who lived in cities were less than 15% of the population. By 1975, this proportion had risen to 23.4% and by 2000 was 43.3%. According to him, urban population growth rate is 4.8% annually; much higher than the national growth rate of 2.2% (HDR, 2004). The implication is that by 2015, more than half of the nation's population would be urban dwellers. According to Mabogunje (2002), the 1991 National population census recorded 359 urban settlements of at least 20,000 people in the nation and estimated the figure to have increased to 450 by 2000.

Urban development in Nigeria could be viewed from both socio-economic and environmental perspectives. Increase in the urban population has resulted in the proliferation of slums and informal peri-urban settlements otherwise known as shanty towns. The shanty towns as described by Aina (1990) are deprived settlements characterized by excessive residential densities, largely uninhabitable housing and the absence of sanitation, basic infrastructure and social services. They habour migrants from deprived rural areas who are unable to fit into the economy of the city and so tend to find solace in informal activities and crime. The proliferation of these shanty towns result in the uncontrolled expansion of the urban centers which poses a major planning problem as provision and management of roads, drainage and sewage systems among other infrastructure proves very difficult. Furthermore, shanty towns, a consequents of urbanization, cause increase in the incidence of urban poverty, diseases and epidemics, environmental pollution, urban conflicts and crime.

Population Reference Bureau (2004) identified the urban challenges of less developed countries to be poverty, public and reproductive health, natural disasters and environmental hazards. The Nigeria situation is discussed below:

1.      **Unemployment and Urban Poverty in Nigeria**

Unemployment is one of the major problems confronting Nigeria, and as in many developing countries, it is to a large extent an urban phenomenon. Studies carried out by the International Labour Organization  have proved that many of the urban dwellers in Nigeria are underemployed, while 3 million or 9 percent out of the 33 million Nigerians who live in urban areas are unemployed. For instance, out of the 35,000 Nigerians who completed the National youth service scheme (NYSC) in 1982, about 70 percent found no permanent jobs. The ILO survey reveal that the number of unemployed high school graduates have grown annually by 4 percent in

1983 to 6 percent in 1985. Going by this trend, it is projected that only about 6,000 out of the 37,000 members of NY SC that passed out in 1984 obtained permanent employment (African concord, 1986). Currently, Nigeria produce over 500,000 graduates annually 2016 https://qz.com/61.

Unemployment is no doubt related to poverty, more so because the latter (poverty) is often defined in terms of the amount of spendable income available to the individual in a year. The prevalent poverty in the developing countries such as Nigeria is tragic and ironic. This is because many of these countries are blessed with abundant natural resources, which is enjoyed by the few rich and powerful ones. In spite of the economic growth in many of these countries, wealth redistributing measures are half-hazardly done and grossly uneven, In Nigeria poverty in the urban countries is endemic. The Human Development Report (2004) records that 70.2 percent Nigerians survive on less than US $ 1 daily, while 90.8 percent of the population lives on less than US$ 2 daily. Jimoh (1997) claims that 8 out of every 10 urban households in Nigeria are poor. Danmole (2002) had maintained that poverty is a major factor in urban congestion and environmental degradation. That it is a thread to the political stability, social cohesion and environmental balance of our cities and until it is tacked decisively, sustainable urban development will remain a mirage.

## 2. Urban Health Problems In Nigeria

 Proper management of the health of urban dwellers is a major problem facing urban administrators in Nigeria today. The inhabitants of urban centers in most developing countries are faced with serious health problems as a result of poverty, pollution, poor sanitary conditions, poor housing, inadequate supply of safe water, poor transportation and changing cultural values. Harpham and Tanner (1995), Akinson et al (1996) and Bradly et al (1999) in various studies discovered that urban dwellers in less developed countries are exposed to the traditional scourges associated with living in a poor country, such as malnutrition, measles, malaria and cholera.

Inadequate supply of safe water for human use is one of the major threats to the health of urban dwellers in Nigeria. A greater population of city dwellers is force to use unsafe water from local ponds and streams for domestic uses. The problem of inadequate supply of safe water is not peculiar to Nigerian cities but also applies to other cities of the developing world.  Report indicated that a fifth of urban dwellers in the developing countries do not have access to clean water. The problem of non-availability of clean water has exposed the city dwellers to various forms of illness and death. The use of unsafe waters in the Nigerian urban areas has led to the spread of such diseases as cholera, diarrhea and guinea worm among urban dwellers and has cause an average of 25,000 deaths per year in the developing regions (Uzuegbu, 2001).

## 3. Urban Housing Conditions

Oniborkun (1987) conducted a study of urban problems in 38 Nigerian cities and another on urban infrastructure in 3 cities. The surveys showed the

declining quality and gross inadequacy of urban infrastructure. Specifically, it was revealed that a significant proportion (34%) of the housing units in some of the cities had no access to electricity, Pipe- borne water and safe liquid and solid waste disposal systems.

High rate of overcrowding, substandard buildings and infra structural inadequacies have been reported in the housing units in all the urban centers in Nigeria. Access to land, mortgage loans and building materials at affordable prices have become increasingly difficult and have limited the ability of most people to build their own houses. For instance, in 1990 a bag of cement was sold at N5 but in 2013, it was sold for N 1,700, today it is being sold for N 2,600. This has resulted in overcrowding, excessive house rents, poor or total absence of infrastructural facilities and generally unhygienic environments. The proportion of urban housing that was either in need of major repair or was dilapidated in the different states of the federation was put at between 20 and 35 percent. It was estimate by the study that about 3 million housing units were needed to meet the backlog and replace substandard houses in Nigeria about 3 decades ago. With the 170 million people in Nigeria today, the problem of housing could better be experienced than imagined.

The livability of a house is influenced, among other things, by the housing units and the environment in which the house is located. Poverty, on the other hand, not only limits ability to acquire life's basic necessities but also restricts choice of living environments, and the poor in most cases is forced to live in unsanitary environments. The absence of any regular and efficient system of refuse disposal constitutes one of the major sources of environmental deterioration in Nigeria. With growing urban population, the increasing environmental decay of our urban centers, partly resulting from household discharges of refuse, have become a source of national concern. This concern has led many state governments to create agencies for the purpose of refuse collection and disposal. In-spite of these efforts, the problem of refuse collection remains a difficult one.

## 4.      Environmental Impact Of Urbanization

Most of the urban centers in Nigeria developed on undulating topography, weakly consolidated rock strata, swampy or erosion prone terrain. At present many of the urban centers have grown beyond their former size and engulfed peri-urban lands and poor terrain. In the major cities of developing countries between 30 to 70 percent of the urban population live outside the law on steep slopes and swampy ground prone to flooding. These risk prone areas are often occupied by the poor and recent migrants into the city. As the poor spread and across swampy zones and mudflats, the rest of the city spreads up steep slopes (Lambi, 1989, Lambi and Forgwe, 2001; Tadinki, 1999; Mainet, 1978). According to Wijkman and Timberlake (1984) floods affected 5.2 million people a year in the 1960s compared with 15.4 million in the 1970s. Between 1964 and 1982 floods killed 80,000 people and affected 221 million worldwide.

In recent years, urban floods have hit many cities in Nigeria. During the

present decade, the cities of Lagos, Ibadan, Onitsha, Lokoja, Aba, Abakaliki and Port-Harcourt have experienced catastrophic flood events. The 2012 floods caused by the heavy rainfalls of that year and the eventual opening of the flood gates of the Lagdo dam in Cameroon affected Lokoja, Onitsha, Port-Harcourt and Abakaliki cities. Invariably, natural disasters in cities kill or injure mostly members of low income groups because the poor live in unsafe housing on vulnerable lands. The loss of homes, possession, and often livelihood because of a natural disaster often leads to further impoverishment.

Industrialization, the use of motor vehicles, motorcycles; tricycles (ke-ke napep) also pose a significant environmental thread to urban residents. They are all major sources and causes of pollution in the cities. The use of energy to run modern urban systems such as air conditioning and electrical appliances often involves burning of fossil fuels which release such greenhouse gases as carbon monoxide, carbon di-oxide, and nitrogen oxides. These emissions lead to global warming, which can cause destruction of the ozone layer, climate change, rising sea level and extreme weather events.

**Towards A Sustainable Urban Development in Nigeria**
Sustainable development can be achieved in Nigeria by a pragmatic and efficient campaign aimed at tackling poverty and environmental degradation which are all root causes of poor or substandard housing, inadequate services and health problems of the urban residents.

**Sustainable Strategies for Alleviating Urban unemployment and Poverty in Nigeria**
Urban poverty and unemployment in Nigeria can be drastically reduced if the government and all concerned consistently pursue the following strategies:

❖ Efforts should be geared towards the overall improvement of the economy of the nation, through result oriented economic programmes that will have positive effects on economic growth.

❖ Educational and vocational trainings which aim at producing self-reliant graduates and school leavers should be encouraged in order to depart from the present situation where most school leavers are job seekers.

❖ The government should make deliberate efforts to control rural/urban migration through giving attention to the development of the rural areas.

❖ Job creating programmes should be initiated in partnership with NGOs and the Private sector in order to create more jobs that will empower the growing urban poor.

❖ Deliberate efforts should be made to control the population at the national level and to provide adequate social security service.

**Sustainable Strategies for Effective Urban Environmental Management in Nigeria**
Urban problems in Nigeria are associated with human activities. This state of affairs should challenge the government and urban planners on the appropriate measure to tackle the urban environmental problems.

❖ Phil-Eze (2001) suggested that the first strategy would be to prevent urban environmental problems from becoming unmanageable. The second strategy will be to salvage through remedial measures urban centers already trapped in the menace.

❖ He further explained that for urban centers yet to be developed there should be proper administration and management of urban lands and functional land use planning and implementation by town planning authorities.

❖ Choice of location of the future urban centers should be guided by terrain analysis which must accommodate probably maximum growth and expansion of emerging urban centers.

❖ The existing natural policy on the environment should be implemented to the letter in order to efficiently manage solid waste and industrial pollution.

❖ The government should provide affordable, legal and adequate land for housing development.

❖ The government and urban administrators should make adequate budgetary allocation for the provision of social services in the country. When this is done, people will have access to regular medical attention at little or no cost, more housing estates will be built and opportunities for better accommodation provided, better, means of transport will be provided thereby reducing road accidents.

❖ On the numerous urban health problems, efforts should be directed towards increasing the supply of safe water to the urban dwellers. The government and urban authorities should ensure that urban wastes are properly disposed of and the financial allocation for social services increased. To ensure they supply safe water, the government should reduce the cost of installation of taps in the homes and compounds. This will enable many people especially the urban poor to install taps in their homes, use clean water and reduce the rate of contracting water borne diseases. On the health problems caused by pollution, industrial estates should be located away from residential areas in order to reduce the degree with which people inhale industrial waste from the air. This will go a long way in reducing the rate of contracting diseases caused by pollution.

❖ There should be a strong policy on urban renewal and slum clearance like the type in Lagos, Ibadan and Enugu.

❖ Public health or sanity inspectors should educate the urban dweller on the appropriate methods of collecting, storing and disposing of their waste. They should organize public lectures, symposium among others to sanitary workers on how to ensure adequate safety while on duty.

## Conclusion

Urbanization is a phenomenon of our modern civilization and has become part of our existence. There may be no reliable statistic on the trends or urbanization in recent years; the available evidence suggests that very large numbers of people have adopted an urban way of life. Rapid urbanization means an accelerated increase

in the number of urban people who need land, housing, water, electricity, health care, schools and other facilities. The numbers of people in our urban centres in Nigeria have far out grown the provision of these basic and fundamental services. Our cities are therefore not growing sustainably. The plan of the government and urban authorities must lead to constructive and effective implementation of policies and to ensure this, we need to concentrate resources, manpower, knowhow and finances to sustainable urban development. In this regard therefore, addressing the most pressing challenges of the urban poor will result in the reduction of urban environmental degradation and the achievement of sustainable urbanization.

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