

Socio-Political implication of Urbanization in Nigeria: An Overview

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Abstract: Urbanization is old as human existence when man took a sedentary life to settled and think of how to use the available resources to live a better life. Therefore Nigerian cities witness high rate of urbanization deterioration and are rated among urban areas with the lowest livability index in the world. It is estimated that between 20 percent and 30 percent of the urban population enjoy decent urban life in the country .Although studies have identified various urbanization problems in Nigeria, its impact and factor that lead to urbanization challenges in Nigeria. However the paper examines Socio-Political implication of Urbanization in Nigeria an overview. it is in this premises that the paper explore the use of historical content analysis's with the use primary and secondary sources in its findings.

Introduction

Urbanization is not a modern phenomenon in Africa. It has been occurring since about 10,000 years ago when Africans began founding permanent settlements, which paved the way for the first urban revolution around the Nile Valley in the region of Alexandria in Egypt. However, hunting and gathering forced Africans to move all the time, but when Africans discovered how to domesticate animals and cultivate crops, they were able to stay in one place. Raising their own food also created a material surplus, which fed some people with food production and allowed them to build shelters, make tools, weave clothes and take part in religious rituals.¹ The emergence of cities led to both specialization and higher living standards in the pre-colonial Africa.

However, by 3000 B.C.E., the Egyptian cities flourished as did cities in Africa to the South of Sahara. Axum, the capital of Ethiopia Kingdom, lasted from the first century C.E. until about the tenth century C.E. In West Africa, between C.E 700 to C.E. 1600, prominent cities such as Kumbisaleh, Timbuktu, Djenne, Kano among others. Also, new cities developed amongst the Yoruba, Ashanti, and Benin Kingdom. These cities apart from being commercial and political centers, they were religious centers as well. In the second half of the thirteenth century, trade with Europe also contributed to the urbanization of the North Africa.²

Therefore By the late thirteenth century, merchants from the Italian cities established commercial links with Egypt. These first urban revolutionary processes and development patterns of the African cities were suddenly disrupted and stifled with the Berlin conference of 1884/85 and its instruments of colonialism and imperialism. African cities emerge has urban centers were apportioned among the European powers, in order to balkanize and destroy the urban centers in Africa, the European powers created new cities or urban centers either in the existing African cities or at a completely new site. Completely new cities were especially founded in the mining regions Zone to house the mine workers. Examples include Enugu and Jos in Nigeria.³

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In this new wave of urbanization, the flourishing pre-colonial cities were strategically ignored by the colonial European powers. In effect, such cities disappeared as for example Kukkawa and Dahomey. The disappearance of most Indigenous African cities led to the sudden appearance of rural–urban migration, Which pulled labour away from the countryside to the new urban Centers created by the Europeans.⁴ In these new administrative urban Centers Africans lived in small spaces and under poor sanitary conditions prone to illnesses. The colonial Urbanization and its Political Challenges in Developing Countries governments' response was not to improve the African conditions, but rather to separate Europeans from Africans and establish influx control laws. In South Africa, this resulted in the official policy of apartheid from 1950 and was insidiously extended to settler cities like Nigeria, Lusaka and Nairobi.

In Nigeria, the colonial government created a new reserved area with the best infrastructural facilities for the Europeans while compelling Africans to live in the least developed areas outside the periphery of the cities, leading to the rise of slums in the history of African urbanization.⁵ Therefore, the strategic creation of new urban centers and the disintegration of indigenous African

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urban centers created new problems, contradictions and misconceptions about the origin, meaning and nature of urbanization in Africa.

Urbanization in Africa has been widely misconceived as having been the result of colonization. It is claimed that the Africans did not have the political sophistication and organizational ability to build urban cities but rather lived in isolated settlements prior to the colonial era.⁶

Moreover, this misconception has made it very difficult to define what is known as “urban” from its African perspective and perception. As can be inferred, there is no specific definition for the term urban; rather it has been defined differently in various countries and by various disciplines. Thus, the factors that contributed to urbanization in Europe and the United States of America were different from what Africa has experienced and continue to experience. This divergence calls for a different approach in the attempt to define and solve urban problems.⁷

However, in Africa, both migration and natural increase were the main causes of urbanization and migration, which is also a product of rural push. Hence, the rate of urbanization in Africa is increasingly rapid and is associated with problems such as inadequate infrastructure, waste management and inadequate housing. In order to overcome these problems, African countries rather than looking inward turn to international donor agencies from Europe and America for assistance. These donor agencies have one remedy for all development problems created by rapid urbanization process in Africa.⁸

The development policy options which they tacitly impose on African countries ranges from the introduction of neo-classical liberalism to the quest for the institutionalization of democratic governance and values. Thus, these development options and efforts do not seem to yield any meaningful results because urban problems continue to escalate in Africa. This is an indication that some important policy options or development values might have been missed in the efforts of African governments to solve these urban problems.⁹

The Nature of Urbanization Growth in Nigeria

Long before the British colonial administration in Nigeria, there were already in existence fairly large human settlements. These were mainly driven by trade (including slave trade) and administration. However, pre-independence Nigeria had a very low urban population as well as urban population growth as. As at 1921, only ten Nigerian settlements had urban status and by 1931 only two cities, Lagos and Ibadan had populations in excess of a hundred thousand people each. Post-independence Nigeria witnessed more rapid rate of urbanization. Nigeria since independence has become an increasingly urbanized and urban-oriented society. By the early 1960s the cities of Lagos and Ibadan had populations in excess of half a million people each. In addition, there were twenty four cities with populations of not less than a hundred thousand people.¹⁰

However, it was not until the period between 1970 and 1995 that Nigeria witnessed an unprecedented high level of urbanization reputedly the fastest urbanization growth rate in the world at the time. By 1991, Nigeria was reportedly 37% urbanized. The rapid growth rate of urban population in Nigeria was spurred by the oil boom prosperity of the 1970s and resultant massive development projects in the country which catalyzed a great influx of people into urban areas. Summarized factors responsible for high urbanization in Nigeria as follows:

- The oil boom of the 1970s and early 1980s;
- Government policies which resulted in the creation of new states and local government areas;
- Creation of a new federal capital territory in Abuja;
- Establishment of new Universities; and
- Large scale government sponsored construction projects including sea ports, refineries and steel companies.

In 1990 there were twenty-one state capitals in Nigeria, with estimated populations of at least 100,000 inhabitants each which were projected to double every fifteen years. Thus 43.5% of the Nigeria people lived in urban areas as at 2000 with predictions that the urban population will hit the 50% mark by the year 2010 and 65% by 2020, given an annual urban population growth of 5.5%.

Like what obtains in other developing countries, rapid urban growth in Nigeria has outpaced capacity of government to plan for it.¹¹ Often, growth occurs so quickly that government officials do not have relevant statistics needed for sustainable development. Another constraint has been dwindling national resources which have further been depleted by massive and uncontrolled corruption. Consequently development is meager, insufficient and not associated with the commensurate economic growth and effective redistributive measures required to alleviate poverty and create economic opportunities needed to improve living standards and quality of life of the people.

Impact of Urbanization in Nigeria

A crucial aspect of this is that city growth and expansion in Nigeria has been largely uncontrolled and thus compounding problems in Nigerian. These problems include inadequate and poor housing; slum areas; inadequate water supply; waste disposal; traffic and human congestion; high rates of unemployment and underdevelopment; poverty; crime and other social problems, and

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Although studies have shown that the problem of housing is universal, and opine that it is more critical in developing countries like Nigeria because of its magnitude and lack of resources to tackle it. About 60-70% of Nigerian urban dwellers live in slums.¹²

Nigeria is highly vulnerable to the impact of climate change. Virtually every Nigerian city is vulnerable to natural or man-made disasters. The poor however have greater difficulties recovering from disasters. In August 1988 for instance, 142 people died, 18,000 houses were destroyed and 14,000 farms were swept away when the Bagauda Dam collapsed following a flash flood. Urban flooding occur in towns located on flat or low lying terrain especially where little or no provision has been made for surface drainage, or where existing drainage has been blocked with waste, refuse and eroded soil sediments. Extensive flooding is a phenomenon of every rainy session in Lagos and other cities. The frequent overflow of the Bar Beach since 1990 poses a threat to the prime property areas of the Ahmadu Bello Way, Victoria Island, Lagos .Only recently in late 2012, many parts of Nigeria experienced an unprecedented mass flooding which reportedly destroyed several lives and properties including farm lands and livestock. Governments of affected states are still grappling with resettlement of surviving victims and resultant food shortage occasioned by the disasters.¹³

Conclusion

Urbanization is an inevitable process which unfortunately was not anticipated and planned for. The challenges posed by urbanization in a city like Lagos are many but not insurmountable. Tackling such challenges will require good knowledge of the characteristics of the people accessing the city as well as accurate projections of future urban growth. While housing should not be treated in isolation, sustained effort including adequate budgetary allocations and strengthening of relevant agencies are required to address the protracted housing challenge. However, the cultural factors seems to be more pronounced in the Nigerian context because most of the identified urban environmental issues are so much associated with the way of life of the people either as reactions to urbanization or their spatial heritage.

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