Prospects and Challenges of Informal Settlements and Urban Upgrading in Abuja

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ABSTRACT: The paper studies Informal settlements in Abuja, from the analytical framework of poverty and homelessness. The environmental, socio-economic and cultural feature associated with population growth, is, highlighted to underscore the severity of issues. Drawings lessons from experiences of squatter settlement in Brazil, India, South Africa and other developed economies; paper underscores Government policies and interventions in upgrading 'slums' and 'squatters' settlements. The paper in conclusion suggests needs to improve and upgrade the general quality of the physical conditions of the environment of urban slums and squatters' settlements in the developed edges (Karu, Durumi, Nyanya, and Maraba) of Abuja, Nigeria.

KEYWORDS: Homelessness, Informal settlement, Poverty, Urban Upgrading

1   INTRODUCTION

Abuja with population of, 778,567 (NPC, 2006) is a planned modern city with magnificent buildings, and good road network, have undergone a growth rate of about 30 percent each year as evidence shows from recent reports. Large-scale migration from rural areas and other cities in Nigeria, particular, is amongst major reasons for population increase. Less than 30 years of being the capital city of Nigeria, there are informal settlements in the midst of magnificent modern buildings. "Squatter settlements" and "shantytowns" are, spreading rapidly in and outside the city limits (satellite towns) like *Karu, Durumi, Nyanya, and Maraba* amongst others. Many residents in these suburbs lack amongst others drainage, good physical and environmental conditions, sanitation, sewerage, and safe drinking water; their drinking water comes from wells and hand-pumped water boreholes. United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-Habitat, 2003) reports, that squatters and urban poverty is not only a manifestation of population explosion, demographic change, and globalization; but also, the result of failed policies, poor governance, corruption, inappropriate regulation, dysfunctional land markets, deficient financial systems and a fundamental lack of political will. The population of residents in squatters and shantytowns in Abuja is rising daily. According to a report by the Global Urban Observatory (2003), urban poverty in developing Nations is usually concentrated in squatters and other informal settlements; and, these cities lack decent housing, inadequate facilities like water supply, sanitation, sewerage, drainage, community centers, and health care. This condition is similar to Abuja and many other cities in developing Nations. However, most of the residents of these informal settlements play important roles in the economy of the Abuja. They remain neglected. Regular fires, diseases, environmental degradation, crime, and evictions at short notice are constant experience of the large fraction of population in these settlements. This paper will in subsequent section suggest ways to bring better quality of life in these areas.

2   LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

Rapid urbanization and inadequate capacity to cope with the housing needs of people in urban areas have contributed to the development of informal settlements. Living in these settlements often poses major health risks. Sanitation and drinking water quality are often poor, with the result that residents are, exposed to a wide range of unhealthy living conditions. Overcrowding can contribute to stress, violence and increased problems of drugs and other social related problems. The

environmental quality of an urban area has a serious effect on the health condition of residents. The negative consequences of poor environmental quality affect every aspect of their lives as well as the livability and health of the community at large. In many parts of the world millions of people live in informal urban settlements especially in developing Nations where lack of resources and inadequate infrastructural facilities lead to degradation of the environment. The issue of informal settlements in Abuja as the administrative center of Nigeria has been, aggravated by high rate of migration from other cities, people in search of better lives. The next section and subsections discusses informal settlements, poverty, and environmental condition of squatter settlers in Abuja. Socioeconomic and cultural quality of people living in these areas is, emphasized.

2.1   INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

According to UN Habitat (2011), informal settlements are:

i)   residential areas where a group of housing units has been constructed on land to which the occupants have no legal claim, or which they occupy illegally;
ii)   Unplanned settlements, and areas where housing, is not in compliance with existing planning and building regulations.

An informal settlement is a dwelling constructed usually without a formal design and standard specifications with regard to legal rules and regulations controlling urban developments in an urban areas, and usually of temporary structures. These settlements usually would not have access to public utilities like power, clean portable water, sanitation, and drainage. Social services like schools, hospitals, entertainment, churches, mosques, markets are rare. They are common features in developing Nations and are product of an urgent need for shelter by the urban poor. Informal settlements occur when land administration and planning fails to address the needs of the whole community. However, high land values and the basic instinct to survive are causing people to move and their activities to other urban and semi urban areas of *Karu, Durumi, Nyanya, and Maraba in* Abuja. In addition, some policies of the government are causing some important government agencies and institutions to be located outside the metropolitan area.

2.2   POVERTY

According to UNDP (2003), 80% of Nigerians lives under the poverty line (less than $1.00 per day). An equivalent of ₦160.00 exchange rate in 2014. The figure A. shows the endless and vicious cycle of poverty.
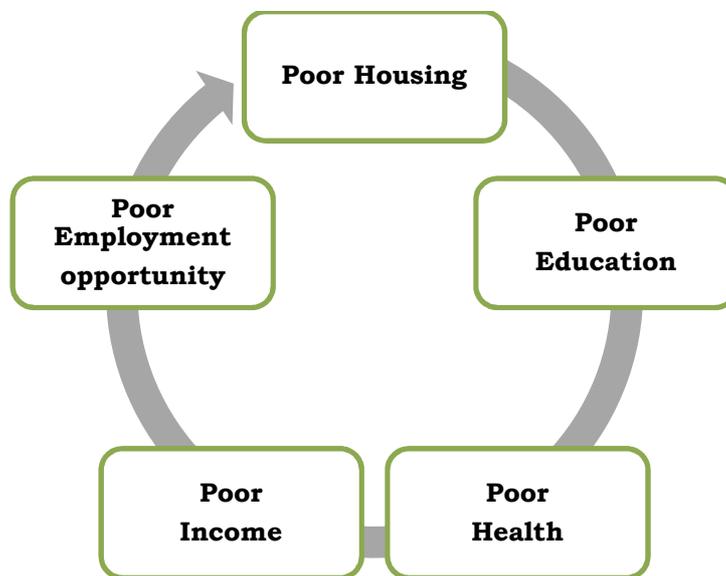
Fig. A: The Cycle of Poverty

Table: 1. Shows the effect of poverty on the demographic of Nigeria where now about 70% of its populace is poor (FOS and CIA, 2010). UN's World Summit on Social Development, the 'Copenhagen Declaration', states that Poverty is a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education, and information.

Table 1. Nigeria: Trend in Poverty Level, 1980-2010

	1980	1985	1992	1996	2010
Poverty level	28.1%	46.3%	42.7%	65.6%	70%
Estimated Total Population	65m	75m	91.5m	102.3	150m
Population Poverty	17.7m	34.7m	39.2m	67.1m	105m

Sources: Compiled and calculated by the author from: federal (Nigeria) office of statistics' report for 1980 to 1996 and CIA World Fact Book February 2010

Poverty has a social dimension (poor quality of housing and the living environment, i.e. lack of access to basic services like clean water, health care, education etc.). Abuja is one of the most rapidly urbanizing cities in Africa, faced with challenges of squatter settlers. The shelters are, built by the efforts of the squatters who cannot afford to secure legal or formal land or a safe site on which a house can be, built. Informal land developments provide shelter for over 85% of the population of urban residents in most developing Nations (UNCHS, 1996 and 2000; Durand-Lasserve, 1997).

2.2.1 URBAN POVERTY

Urban Poverty according to the Copenhagen, resolution (2000) is strongly associated with high levels of environmental risk. This is largely due to poor quality and overcrowded housing conditions and the inadequacies in provision of water, sanitation, drainage, health care, garbage/waste collection, poor percolation resulting into flood, building on waterways and pollution of land, air, and water. Daramola and Ibem (2010) affirmed that the concentration of more people in urban areas has brought more pressure on the land space for the production of food, infrastructure, housing, and industrialization. The movement affects the capacity of the environment to cope, as each additional person increases the demand on the infrastructure and the natural system and as result creating ecological imbalance with adverse environmental penalty in hazards and disaster.

2.3 HOMELESSNESS

The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 of the UK makes Housing Authorities responsible in respect of persons who are homeless or threatened, with homelessness. Circular no. 90/77 explains British Government's policy while Circular no. 116/77 is the code of guidance prepared by the Secretary of State for the Environment. A person is, classed homeless if:

She/he together with any person who might normally reside with her/him has

- no accommodation or cannot secure entry to her/his accommodation or it is probable that occupation of her/his accommodation will lead to violence,
- His accommodation consists of a moveable structure and there is no place, he is entitled to place it, and reside in it.
- Threatened with Homelessness if it is likely that he will become homeless within 28 days

3 CAUSES OF INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

The following are amongst major influencing factors causing the increasing size and demography of informal settlements in Abuja

- The inability of the economy to cater for the housing needs of the low income and no income groups who form the majority.
- The deficit in housing supply as a result of a combination of factors including high population and urbanization growth rates, couples with high incidents of poverty amongst the population
- Failures to give the housing sector its due priority in general economic development. The sector competes with all others in accessing the limited resources of finance, management, labor, materials, and land
- Housing and urban development policies that tend to favor production of formal housing.

4   CHARACTERISTICS OF INFORMAL SETTLEMENT

4.1   LAND TENURE

Government owns most of this land. Some are, owned privately for speculation or actual development that is still on the drawing board waiting funding, approval or feasibility.

The land unused or no longer in use for long periods is easy targets for settlement for the homeless. Informal settlements spring upon these lands. Many poor and low-income families excluded from access to land and housing in the formal sector in Abuja find refuge in the informal settlements where land, housing is, purchased, and built according to means and capacity. They have no security of tenure because of lack of certificate of occupancy. However, many informal settlement residents has rights and interests in the land on which they live, having validly acquired land from legitimate land holding families or communities.

4.2   ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITION

In many parts of the world millions of people live in informal urban settlements especially in developing Nations where lack of resources and inadequate infrastructural facilities lead to degradation of the environment. Environmental degradation, inadequate basic services, and infrastructure in these areas are on the increase. Deteriorating environmental conditions populate poverty. Presently these areas in Abuja reflects the embodiment of the contemporary decay of urban life as evident in the standard of living, congested apartments, degraded environment, crime, among others.

4.3   THE STRUCTURES AND SOCIAL AMENITIES

Most structures are temporary, made of mud walls and roofs or mud walls and grass or other roof covering. Very few are more permanent, in concrete walls and occasionally tiled with no formal approval for building. They also lack social amenities like cinemas, theatre.

4.4   INFRASTRUCTURE

There usually in some cases, no electric power, no piped waters in the house, No roads, no sanitation, no drainage (Adiukwu, F.O & Akinsola F.F, 2011). There are a few latrines and contraptions used as bathrooms. Security outfit like a police station is lacking. The residents organize their own vigilante groups. Similarly, the residents themselves organize one of the other social infrastructures.

They build their own churches, mosques, and dispensaries.

4.5   LEGAL

Informal settlements are human habitats but without formal license, lease, and the tenants pay rent to unofficial property owners.

4.6   ECONOMIC & FINANCIAL

People with very low incomes and no obvious economic power occupy the informal settlements. They are not attractive to the regular investor who seeks a handsome return on investment. The issue of urban poverty in Nigeria as exemplified by the situation in Abuja being the administrative centre of Nigeria has, been aggravated by high rate of rural urban migration tied with the inability of the urban areas to create jobs for the immigrants.

4.7   SOCIO-CULTURAL

Informal settlements create their own ways of life that are typical for that kind of community.

There is harmony and comfort with the circumstances. People have made friends. Upgrading would disrupt a set pattern of life, since it will call for evacuation, displacement, relocation, and new neighborhoods.

4.8   INTERVENTIONS

Driven by the quest to eliminate or drastically curb the spread of informal settlements, the government utilizes forced eviction as a tool of urban engineering with counter-productive outcomes. Urban experts estimates that 800,000 urban residents were, forcibly evicted from informal settlements, in Abuja from the year 2003 to 2007. Every time informal settlements are, destroyed, people's livelihoods, home and place of solace is shattered. In addition to the broad range of social, economic, psychological, cultural, and 'havoc' inflicted on the victims, forced eviction has helped in no small measures to stimulate the growth of new informal settlements with more complex dimensions.

5   PROSPECTS OF UPGRADING INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

In 2001, urban experts estimate that 924 million people, or 32% of the world's urban population, lived in slums, 43 per cent in developing nations, and 6 % in developed economies. This is projected to, rise to 2 billion, in 30 years. Because of this trend, there is growing global concern about slums, as manifested in the recent United Nations Millennium Declaration and subsequent identification of new development priorities by the international community. Slums are a physical and spatial manifestation of urban poverty and intra – city inequality. However, slums do not accommodate all of the urban poor, nor are all slum dwellers always poor. In facing the challenge of slums, urban development policies should more vigorously address the issue of livelihoods of slum dwellers and urban poverty, going beyond traditional approaches that concentrate on improvement of housing, infrastructure, and the physical environmental conditions. Up-scaling and replication of slum upgrading is among the most important of the strategies acclaimed by most researchers and scholars that have received greater emphasis in recent years, though it should be recognized that slum upgrading is only one solution among several others. For slum policies to be successful, the apathy and lack of political will of government needs to be, reversed. There is great potential for enhancing the effectiveness of slum policies by fully involving the urban poor and those traditionally responsible for investment in housing development. This requires urban policies to be more inclusive. National approaches to slums and to informal settlements in particular, have generally shifted from negative policies such as forced eviction, neglect, and involuntary resettlement, to more positive policies such as self-help, and *in-situ* upgrading, and right– based policies.

Abuja finds herself faced with the challenge and opportunity to house her citizens better and make decent amenities available to all as a matter of right. This has a direct impact on the national security and national conscience. Strategies to deal with squatters need to be, given adequate consideration much more than the provision of housing and physical services. They need to consider, among other things, questions of governance and political will; of ownership and rights; of social capital and access; and of planning, coordination, and partnerships between all the various partners in urban activities.

5.1   STRATEGIES FOR UPGRADING INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

There are many overall strategies for upgrading informal settlements, but the primary goals of upgrading projects are to provide secure land tenure in informal and often illegal areas, and to improve basic infrastructure and service delivery. Upgrading housing and retrofitting infrastructure for water supply, sanitation, transport, and energy services are critical for improving the lives of slum dwellers. Where feasible community groups should be, allowed, and supported to, play active roles in preparing and executing plans for slum upgrading. Slum upgrading requires a stronger focus on networked technologies, such as sewers, piped water, and electricity grids. Investments in improved sanitation should receive high priority to improve the quality of life and reduce the high burden of oral-fecal diseases in informal settlements caused by widespread open defecation. The high density of informal settlements makes sanitation particularly precarious. Where space constraints are high, low- cost communal toilet blocks have been, used successfully. Effective hygiene education and awareness building programs are essential to create demand for sanitation and to ensure adequate use by all household. Other investments required as part of slum upgrading include storm drainage, community facilities, local markets, and street lighting and Health services.

5.1.1   JOBS CREATION

Good infrastructure attracts domestic and foreign investment, which is necessary for large-scale job creation. A task for urban planners is to improve industrial efficiency and attract foreign investors with industrial parks, export-processing zones, or other designated areas for private sector development. Equally important are measures to support the informal sector, where most of the urban poor work in low paid, low productivity, and low security jobs.

5.1.2   PROVIDING ALTERNATIVES TO SLUM FORMATION

Abuja like many other cities in developing nations will continue to grow at a fast pace, local authorities and national governments need to strengthen urban planning and development strategies to provide alternatives to slum formation. Government needs to make land available to the poor at affordable prices and ensuring the provision of housing and infrastructure. Moreover, transport services at the fringes of the city and urban planning can provide alternatives to the formation of new slums. Local authorities should also provide much of the trunk infrastructure in development areas and establish clear regulatory standards regarding minimum land plot sizes, infrastructure standards, and so forth. Sound urban planning and standards are central in averting or mitigating the impact of floods, landslides, and storms. This calls for setting up of standards in liaison with the "settlers", the professionals, the builders, the local authorities. Upgrade of informal settlements would be the act of improving and creating order in the dwelling communities.

5.1.3   EXPANDING INFRASTRUCTURE

To complement the upgrading of individual informal settlements, most scholars and researchers affirm that citywide infrastructure and services need to be extended, and upgraded. A high priority should be meeting the transport needs through investments in transport services and infrastructure, such as footpaths, kerbing, bus lanes, roads, and mass transit systems. In many cases, investments in mass transit systems do not require expensive infrastructure. In the developed economies, many large cities have successfully developed efficient bus-based mass transit systems that can provide transport services to the poor at a moderate charge. Also important are policy changes to improve the availability of low- cost means of transport, including bicycles. In addition, effective regulation of industrial water and air pollution must complement an urban development strategy to ensure safe urban environment. Solid waste disposal using well designed landfills, wastewater and sewage treatment need to be, provided.

5.1.4   DEALING WITH LICENSES

According to the Doing Business in 2007 report, getting a license for construction permits or approvals in Nigeria it takes 16 procedures. There are usually delays in receiving permits for construction. The procedures are complex and expensive. This encourages illegal construction as well as squatter settlements with its attendant health and environmental risks. Reforming licensing requirements in Nigeria by reducing the processing time as well as decreasing the costs – would not only increase the size of the formal construction sector but also reduce the costs of housing construction.

6   CONCLUSION

As Abuja continues to develop, innovative policies and practices are, needed so that development is equitable and sustainable. The initiatives of South Africa in addressing squatter settlements, for example, have been very successful in which people living in informal settlements, who had no urban services were supplied with water, sanitation, and access to housing. In Brazil, there have been cases where slum dwellers are given right to, land. Abuja being a federal capital city needs infrastructure, and basic services to cope. It has been, ascertained that the urban "squatter" resident lack basic infrastructural facilities and live in unsafe condition. The majority of them are poor. Therefore, adequate infrastructure facilities and decent housing are some measures suggested for an effective urban upgrading.

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