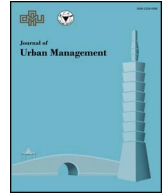


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# The realities of Lagos urban development vision on livelihoods of the urban poor

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## ABSTRACT

Similar to many other cities in sub-Saharan African countries, the struggle between urban development policies and the livelihoods of the urban poor is one of the urban development challenges facing Lagos. This paper examines the realities of the Lagos urban development policies and initiatives on the livelihoods of the urban poor. The state government embarked on series of what it calls sustainable urban transformation policies towards making Lagos ‘an African model megacity’ and a global economic and financial hub that is safe, secure, functional and productive, with a view to achieving poverty alleviation and sustainable development. This paper, through the lens of theoretical and analytical underpinnings of Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, however, argues that the actions of the state government contradict the whole essence of sustainable urban development and poverty alleviation, but reflect an agenda deliberately targeted to further impoverish the poor. While the Sustainable Livelihood was used as the theoretical and analytical framework, this paper essentially focuses on the Policies, Institutions and Processes component of the framework. This provides a unique entry point for understanding the implications of the Lagos urban development aspirations on the livelihoods of the urban poor. The research uses mixed methods research design with a broad range of data-collection methods, including household surveys, interviews, direct observation and photography, documentary review and policy document analysis. The study reveals that there is a disconnection between urban development policies and realities of the poor. The implementation of urban development projects and policies works against the urban poor and resulted in more hardship, through reduction in livelihood opportunities or complete loss of livelihoods. This study, therefore, suggests that one important element in reducing poverty in Lagos’ informal settlements is a policy framework that guarantees inclusive urban development, provision of livelihoods opportunities and accumulation of assets for the urban poor.

## 1. Introduction

Many of the sub-Saharan African major cities are rapidly going through a process of urban restructuring and physical transformation in their struggles to be integrated into the global economic system. Various assumptions, which described Africa as ‘rising’, the second fastest-growing region in the world and “last frontier of development” are propelling many of the African governments to strategically position their major cities to take the advantage through the process of series of physical urban transformations, an idea which [Goldman \(2011\)](#), based on the experience of Bangalore, referred to as ‘speculative urbanism’.

Lagos, just like many other sub-Saharan Africa’s large cities, is cut in the struggles of managing population growth, urban development challenges and quest for urban modernity. Over the years, Lagos has witnessed urban growth, relating to its physical

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configuration, population and socioeconomic composition of its population. Lagos witnessed unprecedented population growth and largely unplanned urban expansion, from its original lagoon setting to encompass a vast expanse of mostly low-rise developments, including as many as 200 different slums ranging in size from clusters of shacks underneath highways to entire districts (Gandy, 2005; Gandy, 2006). By this, the majority of the population live in informal settlements and make their daily living through informal economic activities.

Rapid population growth and urban expansion exert heavy burden on urban facilities. The provisions of housing, serviced land, infrastructure and urban services and livelihood opportunities have not kept pace with the population growth. Poverty, proliferation of informal settlements, overcrowding, and inadequate physical and social infrastructure are the most enduring spatial and socio-economic manifestations and consequences of urbanisation in Lagos (Morakinyo, Ogunrayewa, Koleosho, & Adenubi, 2012; Ilesanmi, 2010). To address these challenges, in recent time, the state government embarked on the implementation of a series of what it calls ‘transformation urban development policies and projects.’ The vision of this transformation agenda is to make Lagos State ‘an African model megacity’ and a global economic and financial hub that is safe, secure, functional and productive, while the policy thrust is to achieving poverty alleviation and sustainable development through infrastructure renewal and urban development policies and projects (INOVATELAGOS, 2013).

However, with the majority of its population living in informal settlements and making their daily livelihoods through informality, in practice, the ongoing quest for urban modernity seems inconsistent with the livelihood realities of the majority. This paper, drawing on series of examples, argues that the Lagos megacity development aspiration contradicts complex livelihood realities of the urban poor. Against this background, this paper examines the contradiction between the quest for urban transformation and livelihood realities of the majority who evidently rely on informality. The materials presented in this paper are based on data from a research project which seeks to understand the complexity of factors which influence the livelihoods of the urban poor in Lagos’ informal settlements, through the lens of the Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA). While the SLA was used as the methodological and analytical framework, as part of a larger research project, the empirical data presented in this paper is limited to the component of the framework which helps to understand the implications of the Lagos megacity urban development aspirations on the livelihoods of the urban poor.

Following this introduction, this paper proceeds with the discussion of conceptual and theoretical issues relating to urban development and livelihoods. The discussion is situated within the broader concept of sustainable development and Lagos urban development context. It then presents the research methodological approach, and analytical and theoretical framework. The understanding derived from the conceptual and theoretical underpinnings was then used to examine some of the urban development policies and projects of the Lagos State government and the implications on the livelihoods of the urban poor. The concluding section summarises the arguments presented in this paper. It advocates that the current urban planning and development policies frameworks must be modified to accommodate the complex realities of the majority and allow them to build on their strengths and use their assets productively.

## 2. Urban development and livelihoods of the urban poor

The struggle between urban development initiatives and livelihoods of the urban poor is one of the development challenges facing many developing countries, particularly sub-Saharan African countries today. Wiggins and Higgins (2008) equate development to transformations of society with sharp breaks from past trends, behaviours and institutions. As such, in this paper, urban development and urban transformation are used interchangeably. In recent years, the call for sustainable urban development has been central to development debate and is increasingly gaining ground in international development. The conceptualisation of urban development determines how it is treated by urban managers in planning and development policy circle. The primary objective of urban development, at least from theoretical perspective, is to improve wellbeing of the urban dwellers. However, the conceptualisation of urban development among urban managers varies markedly, from a narrow concept that defines it as a physical transformation, to a broader concept that incorporates the idea of physical, social and economic sustainability. While there are intense debates about the concept of urban development, there is a reasonable consensus that for urban development to improve wellbeing and contribute to poverty alleviation, it must be sustainable and inclusive (Kamete, 2002). A sustainable urban development ensures a balance between environmental, economic and social concerns while an inclusive urban development will mean that various groups in the society, irrespective of their socioeconomic class, are able to meet their livelihood needs.

There is vast amount of research on livelihoods, which suggest that livelihood is multidimensional covering different aspects of human endeavours. Various development agencies and organisations, such as DFID, UNDP, CARE, Oxfam and FAO, have contributed to the development and understanding of livelihoods (Carney et al. 1999). Also, livelihoods related issues have been widely examined by various researchers in different contexts and they have defined livelihoods in different ways (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Carney, 1998; Scoones, 1998; Ashley & Carney, 1999; Bebbington, 1999; Ellis, 2000; Rakodi & Lloyd-Jones, 2002; Rakodi, 2002a, 2002b; De Haan & Zoomers, 2005; Frankenberger & Drinkwater, 1999). However, Shackleton, Shackleton, and Cousins (2000) note that out of these numerous definitions, two major approaches can be identified – the first one focuses on production, employment and household income, while the second one adopts a comprehensive approach which integrates concepts of economic development, reduced vulnerability and environmental sustainability with emphasis on the strengths of the poor.

Within these two approaches, there is a common agreement that livelihood is concerned with the ways and means by which people make a living, and there is a common consensus that for livelihood to contribute to poverty alleviation, it must be sustainable. A livelihood is considered sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets (physical, social, human, financial and natural) both now and in the future (DFID, 1999). In this regard, there

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