Informal Settlements of Port Harcourt and Potentials for Planned City Expansion

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Abstract: Urbanization continues to occur in the Less Developed Countries at alarming rates and with concomitant socio-economic problems whose solutions are beyond the capacities of most LDC governments. In Nigeria, cities are growing at an average of 5.8% per annum. Port Harcourt, one of the major ones and centre of the country's oil and gas industry is growing largely through unregulated transformation of indigenous enclaves at the periphery, where an informal land market exists aimed at side-tracking the provisions of a 1978 Land Use Act, which vested land rights in the state and sprouting of squatter settlements on marginal land along the city's waterfronts. As a result of the resistance to the Land Use Act, which could have been utilized for large-scale public land banking for development, the 49 squatter settlements of the city have the potential to yield land for planned extension of the city, thereby guaranteeing security of tenure for residents and improving living conditions.

Key words: Urbanization, informal settlements, squatters, indigenous enclaves security of tenure, socio-economic problem, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Urbanization in the less developed cpountries and its repercussions: Urbanisation the increase in size and/or number of urban places is occurring all the time in both the Less Developed Countries (LDCs) and the More Developed Countries (MDCs) however, it is far more dramatic in the former. Twenty years ago, UN-Habitat (1987) made some startling revelations and projections regarding LDC urbanization.

By 2025, probably 60% of LDC population could be living in urban areas:

- About 52 of 114 (46%) of the world's million cities were to be found in LDCs in 1960 by 2025, it is projected that 486 of 639 (76%) of such cities will be found in the LDCs
- By 2025, >1.2 billion people 28.2% of the urban population of the LDCs could be living in 4 million plus cities
- Regarding super or mega cities in 1980, there were agglomerations with populations in excess of 10 million, 3 of them in the MDCs and the rest in the LDCs. In the near future, LDCs are expected to account for an even higher number of such cities. The populations of some of the largest Mexico City and Sao Paulo were estimated to be 25.8 and 24 million, respectively in the year 2000

Some of the undesirable environmental and other repercussions of rapid population growth have long been noted by some commentators as, Omofonmwan and Osa-Edoh (2008).

It is clear that LDCs are experiencing rapid urban growth; perhaps less obvious is that in most cases, such growth is occurring without a corresponding rise in the levels of industrialisation, job creation and overall socio-economic development.

Herein lies the major difference between LDC urban growth and a similar phenomenon in the MDCs at a comparable stage in the latter's development. While urban growth in Europe for instance from the 1890s onwards was accompanied by industrialisation and was sustained by the developing New World and colonial Africa and Asia (Davis, 1975), the LDCs cannot count on any such fortune.

There is a growing fear that there may be an unabated deterioration in the quality of LDC urban life in

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the foreseeable future. With reference to quality of life in urban Nigeria, many alert observers would share the views expressed by Watts and Lubeck (1983) in their contribution to the book, The Political Economy of Nigeria:

> ....let us turn to the issues referred to as the quality of urban life. Here we refer principally to housing, malnutrition, health, community life and the general issues of life changes and personal safety. Given the prevailing rates of urban growth described, housing is a serious problem there is no relief on the immediate horizon for most new housing has been for the middle and high-income groups in the crowded cities, many are sleeping in the open air. Sanitation and health have also deteriorated in urban areas because of overcrowding and the absence of public sanitation facilities such as a comprehensive urban sewage system which all Nigerian cities lack for the popular classes (the "masses"), all of these developments have undermined the quality of urban community life, which, prior to the oil boom (of the mid 1970s to early 1980s), expressed a vitality even under conditions of material poverty

Commenting further on Nigeria, the researchers highlighted the inadequacy and inefficiency of basic urban services and the huge monetary outlay that will be necessary to cope with the problem of providing these services.

One of the issues in LDC urbanization is the spatial distribution of growth. Some the growth is occurring in indigenous enclaves at the periphery or fringes of urban areas in an unplanned fashion giving rise to a host of problems associated with unplanned growth including lack of access to basic public utilities and residential amenities, overcrowding, poor quality housing and poor sanitation arrangements.

Growth is also occurring in informal settlements usually at the fringes or less desirable parts of the urban areas. These settlements are referred to as squatter settlements where residents lack legal tenure and simply colonise available unused public lands which sometimes they have to prepare for habitation. Known by different names in various countries for example, the *barriadas* of Lima, Peru (Andrews and Philips, 1970) and *bidonvilles* in Rabat, Morocco (Abu-Lughod, 2002) such settlements are characterised by a plethora of social and economic pathological conditions and general environmental decay. The Nigerian Government National housing policy document of 2006 estimates that the proportion of the populations in Nigerian cities living in slums and squatter

settlements may be over 80%. This study focuses on the patterns of spatial growth in one of the major cities of Nigeria, Port Harcourt and recommends measures that ought to be put in place to improve private and public access to land and ensure planned growth and enhancement of overall quality of life.

Nature of urbanization in Port Harcourt: Port Harcourt is one of Nigerian's major sea ports and the centre of the country's oil and gas industry. It was established as from 1913 because its site met the locational requirement set by colonial surveyors for a port-terminus deep water near high ground which shall be connected to the mainland (Anyanwu, 1979). The British colonial government needed a railway connection to evacuate the rich produce of south-eastern Nigeria and coal, discovered at Enugu-Ngwo in 1912.

By 1914, a total of 7,403 labourers were engaged in railway construction work at Port Harcourt and along the line. In 1946, the population of the town was estimated at 34,000 (Ibid.). According to the 1952-53 population census of Nigeria, the town's population was 79,634. In 1963, it rose to 179,563. By 1970 it was estimated to be 213,443 and 231, 632 in 1973. The 1991 national census, the population of the municipality was given as 440,399. By 2006, according to the national population census of that year, the population had more than tripled to 1.7 million.

The integral components of urbanization (spatial growth) over the years have included the laying out by February, 1916 of the European town and also the native town there was such segregation from the onset; establishment of the Port Harcourt Planning Authority by December 1946 with an area of jurisdiction of some 25 square miles (about 6,475 ha); introduction by the Planning Authority between 1947 and 1955 of over a dozen planning schemes for the development of the areas occupied by the southern half of the Port Harcourt peninsula, the Diobu villages and the southern suburb, known as Mile 2 Diobu (Anyanwu, 1979). The spatial growth of Port Harcourt has continued steadily ever since. Much of the growth has occurred at the periphery as indigenous rural communities are gradually metamorphosing in an unplanned manner to become part of the city (Fig. 1). Much growth has also occurred in the squatter settlements at the waterfronts of the rivers that virtually surround the city (Fig. 2). Port-terminus status increased its economic importance. These advantages constituted the motivation for massive in-migration.

Squatting commenced then because not all war returnees and in-migrants from the villages could find or afford conventional housing. Since many of the in-migrants came from riverine locations, water fronts of
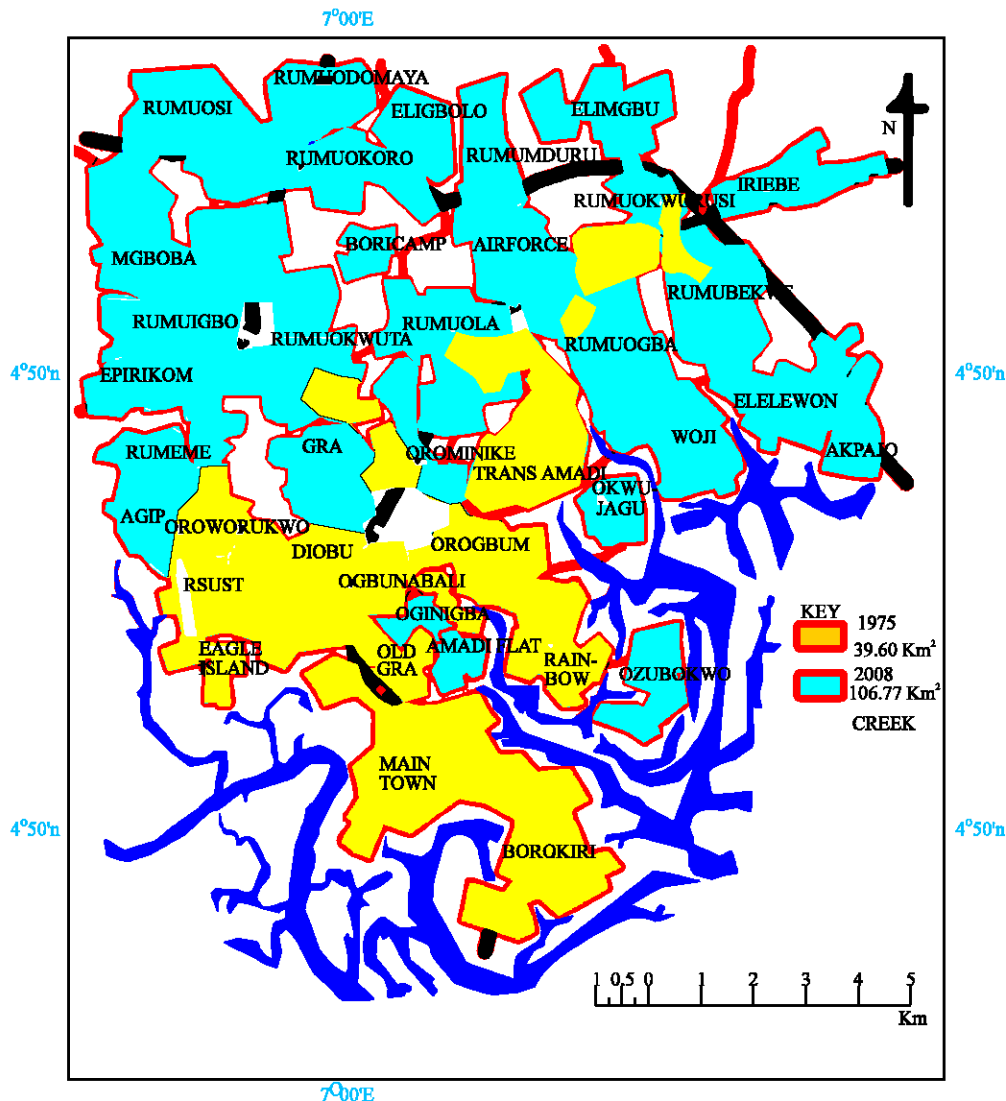
Fig. 1: Spatial growth of port harcourt, 1975-2008

the numerous rivers that criss-cross the city became favoured locations for squatting because they offered opportunity for continuation of traditional water-based livelihoods. Marshland colonisation is carried out systematically from the fringes by progressively adding stabilizing materials (junk, periwinkle shells, etc). As at the time of the last (1991) national population census, Port Harcourt municipality had attained a population of 406,738 persons. Squatter settlements (49 of them) (Fig. 1) are estimated to account for about 65% of the city's population. In addition to the socio-economic pathological conditions noted earlier, these settlements are not planned have deplorable housing, lack space and are not provided with basic services. Since such conditions are manifestly unacceptable, how to deal with the squatter settlements has remained a persistent dilemma for the Rivers State Government (RSG) of Nigeria.

Policy options in dealing with informal settlements: Until the 1960s, the main approach in dealing with slums and squatter settlements comprised clearance and re-development with the attempt to re-house residents in public housing projects, either in rental units or in dwellings that they had to purchase. Socially and economically unviable, this approach was capital-intensive and implemented in a top-down manner which led to lack of ownership and as a consequence to lack of maintenance. Improvements were not sustainable.

In 1988 for instance, the Rivers State Government of Nigeria introduced a policy targeted at the squatters to improve their overall quality of life. However, following completion of three squatter settlement redevelopment projects (Ndoki, Marine Base and Aggrey Road Waterfronts), Government is now rethinking the programme for reasons which include findings that:
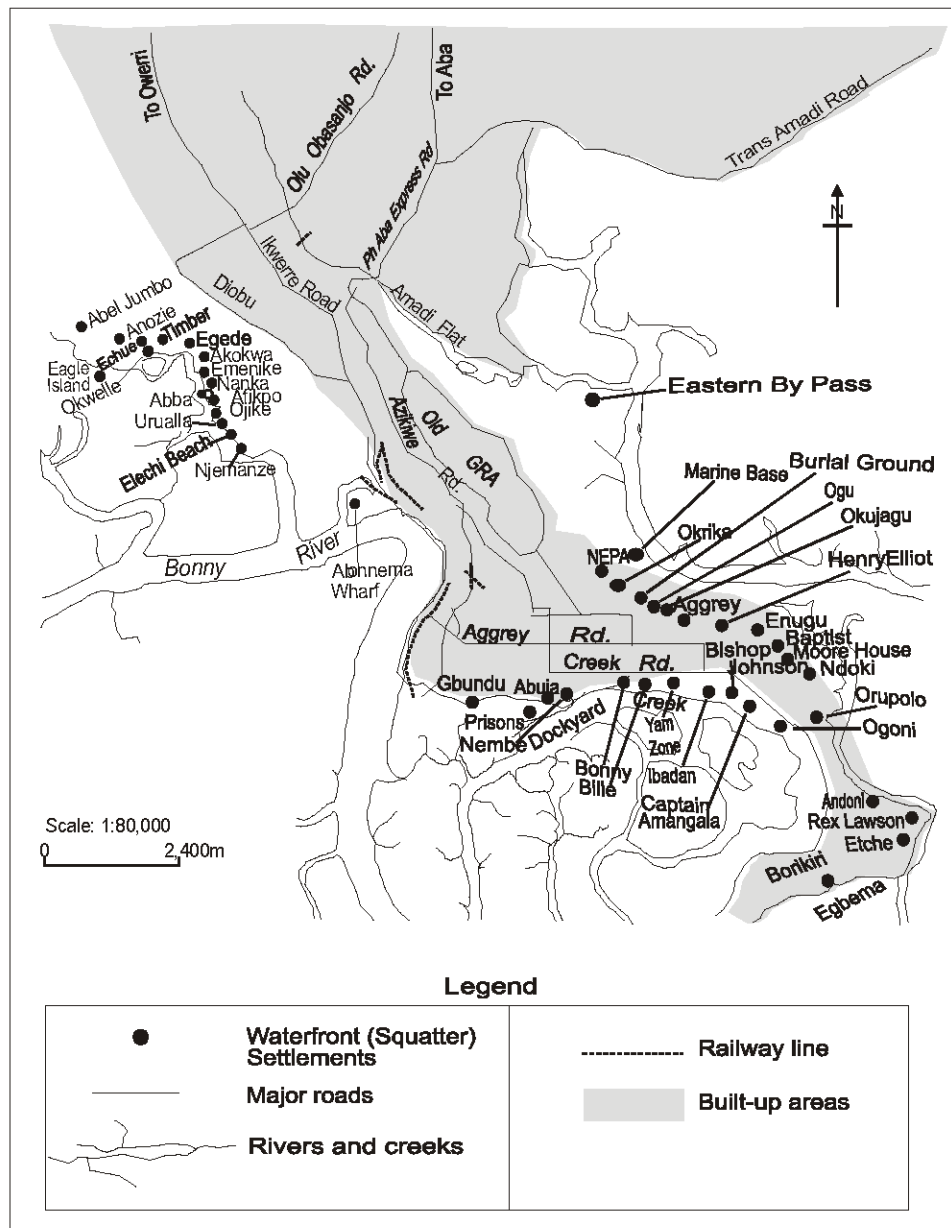
Fig. 2: Port harcourt showing distribution of existing waterfront (Squatter) settlements (Imbasi, 1994)

- In two of the redeveloped sites, only 29.5% of the original squatters were re-housed in other words, Government was inadvertently exacerbating the housing problem since most of those who originally had shelter (no matter how unsatisfactory) were being rendered homeless, a fact that dramatises one of the kinds of conflict which often afflict housing policy in most nations of the world as noted by Donnison (1967)

- The level of beneficiaries' dissatisfaction with the scheme was high at 42%, thereby casting serious doubt on the overall desirability of this mode of Government housing intervention

- Some of the higher-income, non-squatter, beneficiaries re-sold/rented the units thus defeating Government's purpose

Since the 1990s, participatory or community-based settlement upgrading has been the new paradigm. The

argument in the international scene has pointed out that lack of security of tenure, hinders most attempts to improve shelter conditions for the urban poor, undermines long-term planning and distorts prices for land and services, reinforces poverty and social exclusion impacts most negatively on women and children and from the point of view of governments, insecure tenure also has a negative impact on the rate of tax recovery through local taxation on property and on economic activities. According to the World Bank,

> ...for most of the poor in developing countries, land is the primary means for generating a livelihood and the main vehicle for investing, accumulating wealth and transferring it between generations. Land is also a key element of household wealth researchers and development practitioners have long recognized that providing poor people with access to land and improving their ability to make effective use of the land they occupy is central to reducing poverty and empowering poor people and communities

New approaches to security of tenure by international agencies (as outlined by the UN-New Delhi Declaration, Habitat II Conference and the World Bank) are emerging. Furthermore, urban actors are changing their strategy regarding secure tenure with impact on cities' administration, urban governance and sustainable urban development.

Following Durand-Lasserve (2006), two main approaches can be identified in the strategy of aid and development agencies as well as international finance institutions in defining and implementing tenure regularization policies:

- The first one emphasizes access to land ownership, especially through titling programs. Here, tenure regularization is seen as a prerequisite for slum upgrading programmes as an accompanying measure, or as a long-term objective. This is the approach developed by international finance institutions (especially the World Bank and regional development banks). It was presented in several policy and strategy papers in the 1990s
- The second approach, which is to a large extent that of the UN (particularly UNDP and UN-Habitat), emphasizes the social and economic integration of slums and informal settlements. It requires the formal recognition of legal pluralism regarding tenure and of the diversity of land markets. This is reflective of most

of the principles and strategy orientations regarding land formulated in the New Delhi Declaration of 1996. In addition access to land and security of tenure as conditions for sustainable development were adopted by the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) in 1996. In the Istanbul Declaration UN Member States committed themselves to the objective of;

> "Providing legal security of tenure and equal access to land to all people including women and those living in poverty... Ensuring transparent, comprehensive and accessible systems in transferring land rights and legal security of tenure ... Increasing the supply of affordable housing, including through encouraging and promoting affordable home ownership and increasing the supply of affordable rental, communal, cooperative and other housing through partnerships among public, private and community initiatives, creating and promoting market-based incentives"

UN-Habitat (1987) launched the Global Campaign for Secure Tenure in 2000, setting up a Land and Tenure Section within its Shelter Branch. According to UN-Habitat, the Global Campaign for Secure Tenure.

> ...forms part of Habitat's commitment to contribute to the emergence of a new urban paradigm. The extension of secure tenure is but one part of an integrated approach to improving the access of the urban poor not only to improved shelter and...basic services but also to informal and formal employment opportunities, as well as direct political representation... The Campaign is designed to spearhead a shelter strategy that is pragmatic, affordable and implementable

Overall, responses to tenure insecurity vary according to local contexts. There are basically two approaches. The first one emphasizes formal tenure regularization of land and housing in informal settlements. Regularization policies are generally based on the delivery of individual freehold and more rarely of leasehold titles.

The second approach emphasizes one of the components of formal tenure regularization policies, security of tenure. It does not require the provision of freehold individual title, although this is not excluded. Rather, it combines
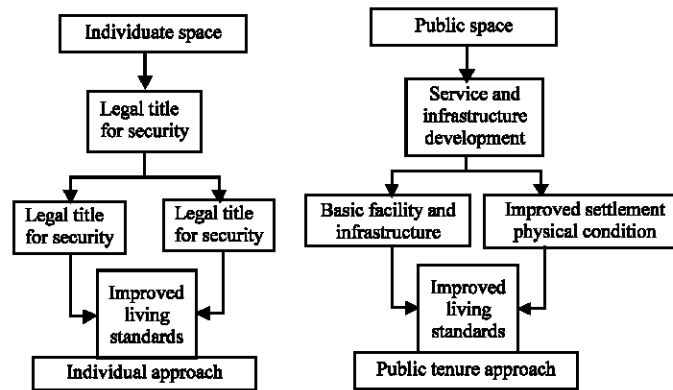
Fig. 3: The two approaches to upgrading of informal settlements

protective administrative or legal measures against forced evictions including the provision of titles that can be upgraded, if required with the provision of basic services. One of the objectives here is to preserve the cohesion of beneficiary communities. Unlike complicated, expensive and time-consuming tenure regularization programs, security of tenure can be provided through simple legal and regulatory measures. This debate highlights two basic answers to the question of ensuring secure tenure:

- Through formal land registration and the provision of individual property titles
- Through other arrangements: those giving preference to the consolidation of occupancy rights (not to be evicted, to have access to services, etc.) rather than to the provision of property titles, those giving preference to collective interests rather than individual ones

The two approaches can be shown in Fig. 3. The squatter settlements along Port Harcourt's water front have developed in a piecemeal fashion. The settlers have no formal title to the land having only been issued Temporary Occupation License (TOL) as evidence of their interest on the reclaimed land. Akujuru (2008) notes that this does not amount to any legal interest on the land. Thus settlers cannot use their property on such land as collateral. In addition, the water-front neighbourhoods are viewed as being of very high risk because of their unplanned and unserviced nature. The suggestion is to improve transferability of the properties by validation of the occupants' title and planning of the neighbourhoods. As most of these squatter settlements contain very large populations whose characteristics are generally unknown to economic and physical planners, the starting point would be to profile the population in these settlements.

CONCLUSION

Clearly, the overall issue of security of tenure in informal settlements is a difficult one and must b attuned to the peculiar conditions in different countries. ccording to UN-Habitat (2003).

Improving security of tenure needs to be tailored to local contexts and needs as preferences for and the feasibility of a particular tenure regime can vary widely within cities as well as between countries or regions. A high degree of participation and decision making by slum dwellers themselves is also necessary. Their organizations should therefore, be recognized as critical partners in any initiatives to improve access to land to land and security

In Port Harcourt, although the waterfront (squatter) settlements are multi-ethnic, they tend to be dominated by particular ethnic groups. The unsatisfactory socio-economic state of these settlements is made more difficult because they are also perceived to be havens for criminals and more recently have become hotbeds for militancy for which the Niger Delta has become infamous.

The previous administration of Rivers State announced in early 2007 a policy of comprehensive clearance and re-development of these settlements but this was stiffly resisted because the squatters saw the move as motivated by reasons other than to raise the overall quality of life in the settlements.

Nevertheless, the squatter settlements represent an undeniable opportunity for government to extend Port Harcourt spatially in a planned manner. Given current conditions in the settlements providing individual titles to residents as part of a process of upgrading (one of the options of Fig. 3) would be a nigh impossible task.

RECOMMENDATION

It would be far more feasible for government to take advantage of its powers under the Land Use Act of 1978 which vested all land rights on the state governor to officially acquire all the lands in the waterfront settlements. The next step would be to survey the sites to determine the extent of their land areas and ascertain the nature of land preparation to be undertaken prior to re-development.

Then a phased approach should be adopted to improve the sites provide the necessary residential amenities and allocating living space first to dwellers of the settlements (with titles) and to others if there are extra units, essentially taking into cognizance the five dimensions of informal settlement improvement (UN-Habitat, 2003):

- Access to safe water sufficient amount of water for household use at an affordable price without being subject to extreme effort, especially for women and children
- Access to sanitation Available excreta disposal system, either in the form of a private toilet or a public toilet shared with a reasonable number of people
- Secure tenure the right of all individuals and groups to effective protection by the state against forced evictions evidence of documentation that can be used as proof of secure tenure status; de facto or perceived protection from forced evictions
- Durability of housing built on a non-hazardous location and has a structure permanent and adequate to protect its inhabitants from the extremes of climatic conditions such as rain, heat, cold, humidity
- Sufficient living area not more than two people share the same room

In this manner, there would be a planned, systematic approach to the extension of Port Harcourt. The upgrading/redevelopment exercise should take place in partnership with the squatters in line with international best practices to remove any feelings that redevelopment/upgrading is punitive, rather than being aimed at improving living conditions.

The government of Rivers State should take advantage of some international programmes whose intention is to raise the quality of life in slums and informal settlements in line with Agenda 7, Target ii of the Millenium Development Goals. Coming readily to mind are such programmes as USAID's Development Credit Authority; The Cities Without Slums Facility For Africa; City Alliance, Community-Led Infrastructure Finance Facility (CLIFF); Slum Upgrading Facility (SUF) and The World Bank-UNDP Water and Sanitation Programme.

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