
EFFECTS OF HOUSING ON URBAN POVERTY - A CASE STUDY OF DIOBU, PORT HARCOURT CITY LG.A, RIVERS STATE

ACHINULO, E. C.

Department of Political Science & Administrative Studies
University of Port Harcourt
Port Harcourt

Abstract: *This paper seeks to examine the nature, bases, and consequences of housing and poverty in the Urban city Port Harcourt with a particular reference to Diobu which is in proximity with Port Harcourt. It tries to envision a Port Harcourt city with adequate provision of houses and where peace, good governance and development are simultaneously promoted and enhanced. It stresses the need for the government of Rivers State to create the minimum conditions for the sustenance of housing development which will alleviate the sufferings of the urban inhabitants and improve poverty reduction measures. Further, it argues that the provision of shelter as a basic need in urban areas by the government does not solve the problems of the urban poor; they equally need other social amenities to improve their standard of living. Moreover, the article considers that government often fails to address the fact that for low-income groups, housing is only part a of a total demand package of services which include accessibility to the place of work and amenities such as water, health facilities, education and retail markets.*

Introduction

In the history of Nigeria, Rivers State was among the pioneer states created by the then' military government headed by General Gowon in May 27, 1967. General Gowon's regime created Rivers State out of the then existing Eastern Region, to destabilize the secession] agitation of the region. It is pertinent to mention that Rivers State as a major oil producing state in Nigeria has, presently, twenty-three (23) local governments which Port Harcourt Local Government is the city local government. Interestingly, the Port Harcourt Local Governmer Area covers part of Trans Amadi, Forces Avenue, Diobu, Aba Road, Borokiri as well as Port] Harcourt mainland area.

As a city local government area, it attracts a lot of migrants from the rural areas come to the urban centre in search of better life. This has gone to a large extent to create problems of accommodation. In urban area, people wallow in poverty and tf excruciatingpains that go with it, caused by malaise within the ambient of the urban areas Port Harcourt. This has brought about atrophy amongst the inhabitants of the area calk Diobu within the Rebisi enclaves.

Furthermore, to understand the subject matter of this paper, it is important to conceptualize poverty. Poverty is both denotatively and connotatively provocative, emotionally, politically and morally. Poverty is state of mind and perception of self in the complex web of

social relations as well as a manifestation of real situation of lackness¹. Poverty is used to describe the condition of an individual who is unable, because of economic, entrepreneurial, social, political and psychological incapacitation to provide himself and his family the basic necessities of life. These basic needs are usually regarded as a minimum level of 2100 calories of food per capita per day plus clothing and a reasonable comfortable shelter. It does not pay the individual much if he does not beg for food but he is isolated, wields no social or political leverage, he is not consulted in community matters because he is bereaved of possible and workable solutions and unable to attract to himself respect, prestige and self-esteem. Based on this premise, poverty may be defined as the inability of the individual to provide himself and members of his family with the necessary physical and non-physical material basic needs required to build an acceptable personality to the mutual benefit of the individual and society². One of the major problems of the poor is housing in the urban area. It is pathetic that decades after the attainment of independence, many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are experiencing more pronounced housing problems to accommodate the people, coupled with overpopulation of its urban areas that lead to the increase in urban poverty. These inadequate housing provisions and the widening poverty have necessitated an immeasurable level of suffering on the people living in the urban areas, lack of these basic human needs, especially, shelter is absurd. This is in spite of the wave of democratization that has swept the continent of Africa and Nigeria in particular. Housing and Urban poverty have not only become endemic but are at the centre of crisis of development in Rivers State, one of the richest, if not the richest state in Nigeria, in terms of natural endowments. Despite these natural endowments Rivers State is one of the most poverty-stricken states in Nigeria with more than half of its population living below poverty line. This has resulted to conflicts taking their toll, rival cults versus government authorities which have brought hardship to the people living in Port Harcourt, the capital city of Rivers State. These conflicts have not only resulted in loss of lives and increased poverty but also, have deterred the rate of development. The logic is very dear; the resources meant for development are simply diverted for increased expenditures on military wares and other measures that are put in place to curb the crimes and reconstruction at the end of each of the numerous armed conflicts that afflicted the state.

The methodology to be used in carrying out this research are the descriptive method of study for accurate analysis and by obtaining information and probably data from such secondary sources as textbooks, published and unpublished academic papers such as seminar/workshop materials. Equally, interviews shall be conducted on appropriate landlords and inhabitants of Diobu areas which include Mile 1, Mile 2 and Mile 3 respectively.

Housing and Urban Poverty

It is pertinent to give a situation analysis of housing and urban development of Port Harcourt in general and Diobu in particular. Housing is one of the essential needs of man, and was in adequate supply in Port Harcourt immediately after the Nigerian Civil War. However, with the expansion of the state's economy due mainly to the activities of the oil and gas industry, throngs of people migrated daily in their thousands to the state. Also, the one-city status of the state has not helped matters. All immigrants to the state terminate in Port Harcourt, the capital. There is also heavy migration from the rural areas to Port Harcourt, in search of white-collar jobs. This impact heavily on the housing situation in Port Harcourt.

Statistics show that on the average, about 6 people occupy a room in Port Harcourt. This is one of the highest in the country. This high demand for accommodation in Port Harcourt has skyrocketed house rents to about ₦3,500.00 per room, per month, ₦4300,000.00 per annum for a 2 bedroom flat, the effect is the massive development of slums along fringes of creeks bounding Port Harcourt. Regrettably, those who live in these shanties are mostly indigenes of the state. This calls for a proactive policy to address the housing problems in the state.

However, houses along the water periphery in Port Harcourt are deficient in facilities that represent comfort and good health. The settlements lack roads, drainage, water and sometimes electricity. Water closets and pit toilets are difficult to construct because of the high water table, therefore, all toilets in the waterfront slums are communally owned and built over water. There are at the moment, about thirty (30) waterside settlements in Port Harcourt. Some of these settlements are Bunde, Marine Base, Enugu; Ibadan, Captain Amangala, Egeck Aggrey, Bonny, Okrika, Ndoki, Bishop Johnson, Agip, Nanka, Okarki, etc. To build in the waterfront settlements, households pile up the hard chikoko mud to extend the riverbank on which they build poorly designed houses. Since the reclaimed land is not properly compacted bank failure frequently collapses the houses into the river. Annual flooding causes considerable hardship in the communities because the reclaimed land is not high enough to remain dry even during minor flooding. Fire is also a constant hazard which sometimes, utterly destroys an entire community³. Furthermore, the cost of building materials are very high that an ordinary man cannot build a house to accommodate him and his family in the urban area of Port Harcourt, even the suburban areas of Rumueme, Rumuokoro, Rumukpokwu etc, the cost of buying land first is ranging from one million naira (₦1,000,000.00) to One Million, five hundred thousand naira (₦1,500,000.00). According to Palen, the cost of becoming a homeowner has gone up from what it was in your parent's days. A way to show the changes in costs while controlling for inflation is to examine the portion of a worker's pay required to buy the average home. In the mid-1950's, the average thirty-year-old male worker could carry a mortgage on a medium-priced home to 14 percent of his gross earnings⁴. Palen concurred that the cost of affording a house is on the high side and that goes to show that housing problem in the urban areas is a universal phenomenon. The idea of people living in slums, squatter and shanty houses pose a constraint to ministry of lands and housing in Rivers State and the government proposes to enact an edit/law that will facilitate the evacuation of those inhabitants occupying there to enable government and private house developers to mount high-rising buildings that will alleviate this housing problems in the city. But the major impediment is that the occupants are majorly indigenes of Rivers State who always resist and deter government officials from implementing enacted government policies. This resistance is backed up by the deviants and miscreants that dominate the environment, because many of them are cult boys and girls that incessantly terrorize the entire vicinity. In this direction, Palen asserts that, the post-war Western European housing shortage came to an end by the 1980's. Attention then shifted from massive building programmes to an emphasis on the quality of the urban environment. During the post-war period, there was heavy emphasis on clearance of slums and war-managed central areas and on the building of new towns on the urban periphery. Outside of England, these new towns were often high-rise in nature. Welfare state-approach also led to the construction of what saw the important part housing problem is the shortage of affordable accommodation for urban poor; the low-income majority. Over the last three decades, most official housing

programmes have failed to reach considerable portions of this group, especially households the lowest 20 or 40 percentage of the population. Factors contributing to this faili undoubtedly include the inability of such programmes to provide enough dwellings. As housii plays such an important part in life, housing analysis has a potentially important role improving the quality of life, at all levels and in every country. Not only can wee attempt understand how the individual house and household are related, at one end of the housi scale, but we can also attempt to use the effects of national policies on housing supply to assess the efficiency and equity of housing policies⁹.

However, these low-income settlements termed slums are owned by high income earners who rent it out to the low-income people. But the continuation of private ownership of these slum lands presents the problems that, if the slum's market value rises as a result of upgrading, the eventual benefits from this will accrue not to low income slum residents (most of whom rent both house and land) but to higher-income owners of the slum's land and housing stock. Moreover, there is a more immediate prospect; any rise in property values caused by upgrading will soon bejeflected in rising land and house rents-a fine result for locai property owners, but disastrous one for many of their tenants¹⁰.

Finally, public intervention in housing is varied. It includes the reguarization of interest on building loans, the institutionalization of rents payable for different categories of accommodation, the control of land, the setting up of building societies or mortgage institutions and in its most visible form, the direct construction of housing units. A number of reasons have been proffered in support of government intervention in housing provision. Adequate housing has been held to improve workers' productivity. It has also been argued that overcrowded, unsanitary conditions of slum areas may lead to **an** increase in disease, crime, and general social and, perhaps political unrest. Provision of decent housing may therefore be a way of reducing such problems. Though debatable, it is contended that massive housing intervention stimulates the economy, and provides a basis for guided urban development. Besides, public intervention in housing is justified because housing is a necessity, it is expensive to provide while its provision can be abused by the private sector and so, lead to imperfections in the allocation of housing resources¹¹. The basic assumption here is that the type of accommodation a household occupies is a fair indicator of its income as this is related to the rent one can absorb or the housing cost repayment one can accommodate. Other indicators of socio-economic categorization, occupation, personal possessions (especially vehicle are used to determine the poor Port Harcourt local government area is where you will locate this geographical enclave called Diobu. It is part of Rebisi communities that are largely owned and occupied by the Ikwerre indigenes of Nkpolu Oroworukwo, Oro Obasiolu, Rumukokwu, and Oro Aka etc. It is an environment that harbours the low-income earners and few of the middle class in Port Harcourt. Diobu is divided into three distinct sections that is tagged; Mile One (1) Diobu, Mile two (2) Diobu and Mile Three (3) Diobu, and this vicinity has boundaries with Rumueme Community in Obio/Akpor Local Government area and part of Port Harcourt main town or centre. To be precise, going by Rumueme axis, Mile (3) three Diobu started in-between Rumukokwu within University of Science and Technology and Custom Gate which lies within Agip Round-About in Rumueme Diobu from there proceeded to Mile One (1) Section of it which ends by Education that is the sprouting point o the Fly Over that proceed towards UTC or Azikiwe Road.

However, within this Diobu area, you will find the University of Science and Technology within Nkpolu Oroworukwo that situates within Mile Three (3) Diobu; the Ultramodern Motor Park that serves for local transportation and interstate movement. Equally, you will find the University of Port Harcourt (Continuing Education) Centre for continuing education beside the IMkpolu-Oroworukwo Secondary School: you as well see the site occupied by the spare parts Dealers of all kinds of Motor trucks, Cars, Caterpillars of all models within the mile (3) three precisely Oro-Obasiolu Community - this area is well known as Ikokwu Motor spare parts dealers; there is one Police Station within the same Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, just at University of Science and Technology's junction that do help to maintain peace within the environment-there is a well-developed timber/wood market along Chief Chinda Road, that supplies wood and all kinds of furniture materials to the people within and around Rivers State; also, due to the natural endowment of land to the entire Ikwere people, a large area of land is mapped out for a mechanic workshops for all kinds of mechanics that repair vehicles, more importantly, there is a modern market that comprises a part of building materials that serve people of that area and beyond, it is called mile three main market; there is a gravel depot in-between the building materials area within mile three market axis and the Ikokwu Motor Spare Parts Dealers Zone; there are so many hotels and brothels within this Mile Three area of Diobu which include; Cool Breeze, Man Alive, Olu-Olu, etc. Most of the sex workers in Diobu are found there, in the course of interview act due to poverty and as a matter of fact, that most of them are the breadwinners of their various families. Finally, there are so many churches which amongst them are Immaculate Heart Parish Church - a Catholic Denomination.

Despite constraints to carry out our research, we were able to carry out our research findings in the few houses that allowed our entrance. At School Road, we were able to come out with the findings that on the average, each of the households is having between eight (8) and ten (10) persons living in one room. Most of the buildings don't have gate out there has no protectors as to hinder one entering the rooms-their door protectors are behind the doors. The space inside the yard, is measuring twelve feet by thirty five feet in-between the rooms that is facing each other. There is no inbuilt facilities as to alleviate suffering and promote good living rather, the mode of living create room for series of quarrels and conflicts amongst them,

Conclusion:

In conclusion, poverty has a number of consequences not just for those affected but also for governments, for the survival of democracy and for the process of development. Although efforts are being made to tackle poverty, in some cases it may even be argued that it is a failure, yet the facts by particularly democratic governments to tackle the problem. Poverty also negatively affects the prospects of democracy in Africa. It is no longer in doubt that many are excluded from the political process due to economic and social constraints. Campaigns elections require immense financial, organizational and propaganda resources, and these hardly be afforded by the poor. Poverty is so harsh that the basic needs of man, exam shelter is not affordable by the poor; hence the poor resort to shanties, squatters a inadequate housing that the poor can try to afford. But the major problem with the poor is tl fact that they don't consider population to be a deterring factor to progressive acceleratr that leads to development. Because in the course of this research study, we found out tr despite the level of poverty on these set of Diobu inhabitants, they still engage in a macro production of children

believing that God gives and at least they will help the family when they are grown ups which on the contrary, they usually turn hooligans, deviants and buffoons, Again, in these areas of Diobu, it is glaring from our findings that, the area is largely occupied by the migrants from and outside the states that migrated from the rural areas in search of a blue-collar or white-collar jobs as the case may be.

Be that as it may, housing is one of the most crucial needs of man that ought to be addressed properly by government, private individuals and financial houses like Mortgage Banks etc, to ensure proper and adequate existence. Poverty made it impossible for the poor masses to determine who governs them as in voting even if they vote, they are influenced by the rich with money which they receive to mortgage their future; failing to realize that the rich make policies that will protect their interest and not that of the masses. This makes the ignorant and un-propertied masses to be less active politically than the educated and well to do. Even as voters, the poor are almost susceptible to being bribed to vote in a particular way as recent elections in the country have demonstrated. Diamond and Bande captured this picture respectively when they wrote that "where civil society is extremely poor in resources and information and weakly organized, it may not take much in the way of bribes and force to sustain dictatorship for a long time" and the dispossessed worker and the displaced peasant, lacking in financial resources, lacking in education, cannot be expected to really make any intelligent choice from among competing alternatives.

On the contrary, he or she is more likely to be bribed in to choosing a candidate; he or she is more likely to be mobilized in to narrow ethnically or religiously motivated actions¹³. The connection of poverty to absence of development is also not far fetched. Development cannot occur in a poverty stricken society because there is no saving and investment and economic growth cannot be generated as a result. Meeting basic human needs is certainly critical to recording any kind of development as Maslow would argue. Indeed, it was Seers who argued that the questions to ask about a country's development are three; "what has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? And what has been happening to inequality? If any of the above has increased, and especially, if all, three have then development is taking place¹⁴. But the reverse would be the case if no progress were made in the above areas. This would be the case even if there is improvement in the quantitative growth indicators of per capita income. GPA and GNP, amongst others.

However, realizing the crucial importance of one having roof over his or her head should ignite a spark on the side of government to create enabling environment by which public entrepreneurs that are into property development would strive to build more complex, estates, etc as to alleviate the housing problems in Port Harcourt City. Urban environment obviously cannot be eradicate'd but reduction is possible if there is the political will to promulgate laws, policies that ensure that building materials are affordable as to enable one build his own house. The ubiquitousness of poverty or urban poverty is glaring, although the degree varies because, despite the level or rate of development in the North (United States of America, Britain etc), there are still beggars on the streets and even eating from the welfare because they cannot afford buying them because of poverty. If the above measures and others recommended by erudite scholars are put in place as measures of mitigating urban housing problems, there will be peace.

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