

URBAN INFRASTRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS IN OWERRI, IMO STATE.

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Abstract

Infrastructure is seen as including those social services derived from a set of public works traditionally provided by the public sector, to enhance private sector production and to allow for household consumption. This includes services like roads, sanitation, hospitals, schools, electricity, water supply etc. Human settlements are referred as human ecology especially when they are concerned with relationships between human populations and their physical environment in urban and rural areas. The shortage of decent and comfortable accommodation in urban area is one of the greatest problems confronting urban dwellers especially in the low-income neighbourhoods. This paper aims at examining urban infrastructural development and human settlement, challenges and how they will be improved in Owerri City. Data for the study were both from primary and secondary sources mainly oral sources from personal interviews, direct observation, official records and private papers. The paper builds literature review to access and review the urban infrastructural development and human settlement in Owerri City. The result revealed the factors militating against the effective service delivery of the urban infrastructure development and human settlement as high cost of providing and maintaining urban infrastructure, poor management and maintenance policy, high cost of housing development etc. Suggestions were then made for improvement.

Keywords: Urban infrastructure, Human settlement, Development, Maintenance, Owerri City.

Introduction

Many cities in developing countries lag behind in providing critical infrastructures such as roads, drainage, garbage disposal, hospital or internet connectivity; many cities in so called developed countries lag behind in modernization and renewal of these infrastructures. We think that infrastructures are a means rather than an end, and should be stimulated via specifications of the respective goals (e.g. on Health, Water). When doing so, however, disaggregation by place should stimulate cities to examine those infrastructures through the lens proposed at present. Are they truly inclusive, connective, and resilient? (Manuel and Adriana 2013).

Infrastructure is seen as including those special services derived from a set of public works traditionally provided by the public sector, to enhance private sector production and to allow for household consumption. This includes services like roads, sanitation, hospitals, schools, electricity, water supply, sewage, etc. (Fawehinmi 2003). Infrastructure refers to those facilities and services that provide the backbone for the development of other sectors of the economy. Physical infrastructure such as roads, railway, electricity supply, water supply and communications play essential roles in the economic growth and development of any nation. Its role as an important agent of development cannot be overemphasized and in this regard, Olayioye (2002), argued that infrastructure is a powerful tool influencing the rate and direction and type of land development.

The adequate supply of infrastructure services has long been viewed as essential for economic development and poverty reduction, both in the policy and academic realms (Ariyo and Jerome, 2004; Calderon, 2008; Estache and Wodon, 2010, Ogun, 2010).

Human settlements are referred as human ecology especially when they are concerned with relationships between human populations and their physical environment in urban and rural areas. The shortage of decent and comfortable accommodation in urban area is one of the greatest problems confronting urban dwellers especially in the low – income neighbourhoods.

Human settlement is referred to any form of human habitation which ranges from single dwelling to large city. However, human settlements are smaller than the infrastructure in which they are embedded, and the important emission sources may therefore be located out the city's territorial boundary (Seto, et al 2014).

In addition, it is urban infrastructural development that makes human settlement liveable. How well a liveable human settlement is depend on availability and its state of infrastructure.

This paper aims at examining urban infrastructural development and human settlements, challenges and how they will be improved in Owerri city.

Literature Review

Infrastructure is the major vehicle that enables individuals to meet the demand of life and, thus, without adequate access to infrastructure, the capacity of the individual to lead a fulfilled life becomes severely threatened (Fawehinmi 2003).

Amis and Kumar (2000) argue that infrastructure helps individuals cope with the different dimensions of poverty. It follows, therefore, that wherever people are deprived of basic infrastructure, the result is impoverishment. It also follows that cities with the greatest number of poor people are those whose citizens lack infrastructure the most.

Donald (1974) defines infrastructure as the physical structures and facilities that are developed or acquired by public agencies to enhance governmental functions and provide water, power, waste disposal, transportation or similar services to facilitate the achievement of common social and economic objectives.

Collins English Dictionary defines the same concept as including buildings, structures and apparatus by which services essential to the development and use of land, are provided by developers and/or statutory authorities. Yet some other people have conceived of infrastructure as works constructed for public use and enjoyment, especially when financed and owned by the government.

Infrastructure can be seen as the “wheels of economic activity” (World Bank, 1994). Thus, development infrastructure capacity can deliver major benefits in economic growth, poverty alleviation, and environmental sustainability, but only when it provides services that respond to demand and does so effectively.

The term infrastructure can assume several meanings while some social scientist define the term to include such facilities as transport, communication and energy, others define it as also embracing water supply, health, education, town and country planning and social welfare (Adeyinka and Olugbamila 2011). Ayodele (1996) suggests that there are both economic and social dimensions to the term; the social infrastructure sub-sector cover social services such as education, health services, information, town and country planning and social welfare services generally in the society. The economic infrastructure sub-sector covers the hardcore economic activities, which relates to the provision of energy, power, transportation services, water and

communication services which are referred to as utilities. Thus, the term infrastructure covers both social services and utilities.

In this regard, infrastructure refers to those facilities and services that provide the backbone for the development of other sectors of the economy. Physical infrastructure such as roads, railway, electricity supply, water supply and communications play essential roles in the economic growth and development of any nation. Its role as an important agent of development cannot be over emphasized and in this regard, Olayioye (2002), argued that infrastructure is a powerful tool influencing the rate and direction and type of land development.

The provision of infrastructural facilities is very crucial in the economic, social, political and cultural life of a nation. The manner in which provision of these basic infrastructural facilities are dispensed to meet the demands of the public in general will determine the level of economic activity and, in turn, the overall development of a nation. Most sectors cannot function without electricity, telecommunications and water; therefore, the adequate and effective provision of these services is central to the growth of an economy and the improvement of public welfare (UNESCO, 2005). Infrastructural facilities provide the basic environment for the production and distribution of goods and services. It is a necessary ingredient for the effective growth and functioning of towns and cities and for the national promotion of social and physical development activities (Olugbamila 2005).

Bell-Imam (1990), notes that infrastructural provision has been a major reason for the worldwide move to promote decentralization of power through devolution to lower levels of government. This, perhaps, must have informed the perception of the 1976 local government reforms in Nigeria as this reform set out to redefine local government as “government at local levels”.

Despite the importance of infrastructural facilities to the development and sustainability of our cities, and the significant attention paid to the provision of these facilities over the years by various administrations in the country, experience indicates that Nigeria is faced with the problem of inadequacy and poor management of public services. Of major importance is the fact that despite the efforts made by government for the provision of various public services in urban centers, the problem of inadequate and inefficient infrastructural facilities still persists. This situation might not be unconnected with the rapid urbanization witnessed in Nigeria in the last four decades as a result of the oil boom era that occurred between 1971-1977.

State of Nigerian Infrastructures

Nigeria today is largely a monolithic economy that can hardly survive any economic misfortune that may befall the leading economic sector (oil industry). This is made so as result of the weak infrastructural development which ought to have provided the basic energy needed in sustaining a more diversified economy.

On average, virtually all aspect of Nigeria’s infrastructure is in deplorable condition. The power sector for instance is marked by low generating capacity relative to installed capacity. (Adeyinka and Olugbamila 2011).

As society develops, the need to provide basic infrastructure for the well-being of the inhabitants arises. Most of the infrastructure are capital intensive in their procurement and perhaps also in their maintenance, and these services are usually provided by the various levels of government in the federation, although private sector participations is now gradually becoming noticeable due to the liberalization policy of some aspects of the national economy by the past Olusegun Obasanjo administration. It must be noted that no nation can boast of an

enhanced economy without providing the basic infrastructure for the wellbeing of her citizens (Frank 2003).

Infrastructure Affects the Level of Poverty in the Following Ways:

- a. Source of Employment
- b. Increased Productivity
- c. It increases the amount of disposable income of residents
- d. Access to infrastructure affects the health of citizens

Main Features of Urban Infrastructure in Nigeria

Urban Infrastructure Propels the Socio-Economic Growth of a City. To be able to do this, not only should the physical structures be put in place, they must also be properly maintained; in other words, they must always be seen to be in good performance conditions.

Key among Urban Infrastructure includes the following:

1. Road Transportation.

Transportation is the means of conveying people, goods, and services from one place to another by road, air and water. In most urban towns, the road is the commonest means of transport. For the economic, social and political development of the urban centres, there is need for efficient and effective urban transport network. Towards the end of the military administration in this country (Nigeria), many of the intra - and inter - city road networks built during the oil boom had fallen into a terrible state of despair, due to poor maintenance of the existing roads; Poor/non – existent drainage, often resulting in flooding; absence of traffic control mechanism along many streets; street trading, which commonly impedes the flow of traffic in most Nigerian cities. (Fawehinmi, 2003).

On the other hand, our roads are begging to be saved across the entire country. The south east, south west road network for instance evokes the most heart rending picture of the extent of damage and deterioration that are the features of our roads. In the past decades or earlier, it takes about three hours to travel from Lagos to Benin. In recent times, this can take as long as six hours if there is no slight obstruction. Motorable roads that are well maintained is critical for the smooth and efficient exchange of goods and services across different parts of the country as the rural areas and hinterlands are also connected. (Adeyinka and Olugbamila 2011).

2. Drainage

One of the major problems confronting our urban centres today is that of yearly flooding of most Nigerian roads after heavy downpour. This is usually caused by blocked drainages or total absence of drainages in the consigned neighbourhoods.

Uncoordinated physical planning, especially in some slums and new development centres within the urban periphery as well as the construction of structures along drainage channels, also contribute to blocking of drainages and subsequent flooding.

3. Electricity supply

Regular supply of electricity is very important for the all-around development of any nation. Apart from domestic uses, commercial and industrial concerns need constant supply of electricity for their business. However, our electricity supply is characterized by frequent power cuts; sometimes, some communities may remain without electric power supply for hour, weeks and even months.

Owing to the epileptic supply of electricity, many consumers have resorted to using alternatives such as candles, lanterns, gas lamps and generators.

4. **Communication**

The importance of effective communication in the economic, social and political development of the urban centers cannot be overemphasized. Communication is a unifying factor. It is a means of interaction between individuals, groups and even nations. Through effective communication, information, messages and ideas are easily conveyed from one place to another. Effective postal and telecommunications system, including the telephone, telegraph, telex, cellular phones, postal offices and others will reduce the burden on the urban roads as many urban dwellers, such as in Lagos metropolis, would be able to transact some of their businesses through the available communication systems rather than face the congested roads. In such a situation, commercial and industrial life can operate more efficiently.

5. **Water Supply**

One of the foremost needs of man for his daily survival is water. Realizing man's needs for his daily survival is water. Realizing man's needs for water, governments, over the years, have created one agency or the other to ensure adequate water supply to the people. The agencies include Several State Water Boards and Corporations. Past water supply from public taps was free. According to Nubi (2002), government's ability to sustain the free lunch led to the commercialization of water corporations, thus restricting water supply to areas that could afford the commercial rate. Even where provision is made for public water supply, private arrangements are still made for boreholes and deep wells.

6. **Housing**

Housing is generally referred to as a shelter or lodging for human habitation. It is a structure designed as an abode for one or more persons. The shortage of decent and comfortable accommodation in urban area is one of the greatest problems confronting urban dwellers, especially in the low – income neighbourhoods. Many factors have been attributed to this development, including: the high cost of housing development; difficulties in securing affordable land in good neighbourhood; general poverty among the citizenry; excessive growth in urban population which puts pressure on the available land/accommodation. (Fawehinmi 2003).

7. **Sewage (solid) disposal**

The rate of accumulation of solid wastes in most urban towns such as Lagos and Aba is quite alarming. Waste deposit, especially along the highways, has clearly become an environmental hazard. In some urban settlements, there may be no designated places to deposit the waste for their onward disposal; hence people throw them about indiscriminately, even into the drainage channels, hoping that the flood will carry them away when the rain falls. Unfortunately, some of these waste deposits end up clogging the drainage channels and turning the flooding of our roads unto a permanent feature of our existence.

A settlement can be looked at as a group of buildings with people living in them. It can be a unit or organized group of men, women and children making their living out of the surrounding environment. There is varying difference in the group size, complexity and level of development. There are many reasons why people choose to live in an area and these affect the settlement growth from isolated farmstead to a village setting and eventually a city, metropolis. (Duruzoечи 2009).

The ultimate objective of all human development is to improve social, economic and environmental quality as well as the living and working environment of all people especially the urban and rural poor. The constituent parts of human settlement development are many and these include: providing adequate shelter for all; improving human settlement management; promoting the integration of environmental infrastructure such as water, sanitation, drainage and solid waste management; promoting sustainable energy and transport systems; promoting sustainable construction industry activities; and promoting human resource development and capacity building for human settlement development (U.N. 1992).

Urbanization is a global phenomenon that is transforming human settlements. The shift from primarily rural to move urban societies is evident through the transformation of places, populations, economies, and the built environment. In each of these dimensions, urbanization is unprecedented for its speed and scale massive urbanization is a megatrend of the 21st century. With disorienting speed, villages and towns are being absorbed by, or coalescing into larger urban conurbations and agglomerations. This rapid transformation is occurring throughout the world, and many places it is accelerating, (Seto et al, 2014).

With the urbanization rapid growth of population in cities and the depopulation of the rural areas, there is the need to control the growth of the urban population as well as provide the resident population with relevant infrastructures and services for an improved quality of life which most urban residents seek for; but at the same time there is the need also to mitigate any negative consequences of out migration from the rural settlements and as well as provide the rural inhabitants with basic services and amenities to improve the environmental quality and standard of living of the rural population by providing them with portable water, electricity, good roads, public service, institution such as schools hospital, etc and sanitation.

It is an urban infrastructural development that makes human settlement liveable. How well a liveable human settlement is depends on availability and its state or infrastructure.

Factors Militating against the Effective Service Delivery of the Urban Infrastructure on Human Settlement in Nigeria

1. **High cost of providing urban infrastructure:** One of the main characteristics of urban infrastructure is its high cost of provision; hence, it has been left for some time to the public sector to handle. Nubi (2002), confirms this assertion when he said that “funding of the urban infrastructure has always been a major concern of all tiers of government and procurement has always been limited by available fund”. Funding the provisions of telephone, electricity, or mass housing projects, for instance, will require a lot of money. Lawal (1997) maintains, for instance, that without well organized and efficient housing finance system, it is difficult to mobilize substantial financial resources for channeling into the housing sector.
2. **Inadequate Budgeting by the Government:** The availability of funds for development notwithstanding, inadequate budgeting could mar the development for a proposed project. Unless adequate financial resources are budgeted for a project, it will normally be difficult for money to be withdrawn for such budgeted projects.
3. **Poor National Maintenance Policy**
The national maintenance policy of our urban infrastructure leaves much to be desired. A major obstacle to our urban infrastructural maintenance is the general attitude of the people to the culture of maintenance itself, Ahmad (1997) states that the major maintenance constraints are institutional and that maintenance is not recognized in the national policy making process; it is not reflected in budgetary or resources allocation

process in spite of the expected contribution of the national assets to the achievement of the nation's macro – economic objectives.

4. **Undue Political Interference/Uncoordinated Government Policies:** Undue interference and poor coordination of government policies can have negative influence on urban infrastructure. The case of the abandoned metroline project may be illustrated here. The proposed project, if implemented, would probably have eased urban transportation problem in Lagos. But the successive military administration abandoned it. The alleged heavy financial cost was one of the reasons given for stopping the project by the military administration that took over power in Lagos state. It is the same story all over the country; each successive government maintains a negative attitude to projects began by its predecessor and the chain continues, leaving the country with hundreds of abandoned projects.
5. **Failure/Unwillingness of Government to Liberalize Policies towards Urban Infrastructural Services:** Past government, for one reason or the other, did not show reasonable interest in allowing private sector participation in our urban infrastructural provision. The burden of providing urban infrastructure was concentrated on the three tiers of government even though the governments lacked the funds to play this role. In telecommunication services, new grounds have been broken by the involvement of the private sector in the provision of telecommunication services, for example, the roles of the MTN, and Econet wireless Companies among others in improving the urban telecommunication services are noteworthy. Fawehinmi (2003)
6. **Public Attitude to Urban Infrastructure:** The idea that “a public property is nobody's property”, is still very rife in the mind of the average Nigerian. This probably accounts for the nonchalant attitude of the public towards public property. Aibangbee (1997) states that it is not uncommon, for instance, for the pipes laid for the distribution of water to be uprooted by road construction workers without any care to repair them, thereby causing avoidable wastage.
7. **Corruption in the Public Sector of the Economy:** Vanguard Newspaper of Thursday, 29 August 2002, reported in its first page that Nigeria is second most corrupt country in the world, after Bagladesh. There is no Nigerian who does not know that this is the major problem in the country. The high class corruption in the public sector of our economy affects very seriously the provision and maintenance of urban infrastructure. These corrupt practices may take various forms. For instance, it is not uncommon to inflate by very heavy margins the budget provision for procuring urban infrastructure, only for the facilities not be procured at all.
8. **Poor Conditions of Service in the Public Service:** Poverty, no doubt, contributes to inefficiency, corruption and low productivity. Prior to the past civilian administration of Olusegun Obasanjo, the annual total remuneration for the average public servant was very poor. The low income, when contrasted with the inflationary trends in the country as well as the nature of our African extended family background with its attendant social/financial responsibilities, financially incapacitates the average Nigerian public servant and limits his ability to meet his socio-economic responsibilities. All these tend to make corruption attractive to him and many do fall on account of such temptation.
9. **The Absence of Effective Physical Development Plan in some of Urban Centres:** A city without effectively planned and development control programme may occasion haphazard developments thereby creating problems when it becomes necessary to site

new infrastructure. Planning according to Olujimi (2011) is concerned with deliberately achieving some objectives (which may be individual or corporate) and it proceeds by evolving strategies and actions arranged in a prioritized order or sequence. Planning can be applied to virtually all human activities, right from the level of individual, the family or neighbourhood to that of the town, district or society and equally to the provision and management of infrastructural facilities. Objective of physical planning is to create or provide a pleasant healthy physical environment for living, working, recreation and movement. In this regard, it covers all aspects of human endeavour and all aspects of natural or manmade resources.

- 10. Institutional Conflicts:** Institutional conflicts and their consequences can cause ineffective infrastructural delivery system between different levels of government. These conflicts could result from conflicting interests such as laying claim to the same piece of land by different bodies or authorities in the desire to provide services. If uncontrolled, such conflicts could lead to improper coordination resulting in inefficient urban infrastructural service.

Solutions to the Urban Infrastructural Development on Human Settlements

1. Since governments alone cannot provide all the finances needed to build and maintain our urban infrastructure, the privatization policy of the federal government as they affect our urban infrastructure should be encouraged. Omirin (1986) stated it is worthwhile for government to consider privatization of some of these utilities, especially those that do not affect the security of the nation; such measure will reduce the burden on the government purse, encourage competition, efficiency, and also make for consumer satisfaction. Similarly, private sector participation in the provision of urban infrastructure should also be encouraged.
2. The maintenance culture of the Nigerian public should be institutionalized. Olawore (1997) suggests that maintenance culture should be made to be part of our national consciousness. To this effect, just as environmental services and basic computer knowledge are now made compulsory in institutions of higher learning and introductory technology in secondary schools, maintenance culture should similarly be taught in elementary, secondary and tertiary levels. In the interim, the public should be encouraged to handle our infrastructure with care and security measures should be adopted to ensure adequate safety of the facilities in place.
3. To ensure adequate fund for the maintenance of our infrastructure, maintenance allocation should be provided annually from the budget provisions.
4. The urban infrastructure should be properly maintained. Omirin (1986), states that maintenance approach to be adopted could be preventive, corrective as well as emergency. It has also been recommended that owing to technological development, it may be necessary to rehabilitate and modernize our urban infrastructure to ensure increased efficiency.
5. To ensure continued improved performance of the facilities, there is need for monitoring and feedback information, which is necessary for future planning.
6. Efforts should be made to co-ordinate the planning and implementation policies of all levels of government as they affect urban infrastructural provision and maintenance. This attitude will not only be more economical but will also achieve greater harmony and ensure improved consumer satisfaction.
7. The popular saying that "Nigeria is good at enacting laws but poor in their implementation", should be reversed. In view of this, it is necessary that the Anti-

Corruption Law of 2000, aimed at checking corruption, is enforced. The regular enforcement of the law and subsequent apprehension and punishment of the offenders will drastically reduce the temptation to lead a corrupt life.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Poor infrastructure is stunting economic growth and efforts to reduce poverty in Owerri city. The present state of infrastructures across the nation depicts gory spectacle which needs to undergo 'surgical operation'.

Governments remain at the heart of infrastructural service delivery. With or without private participation, governments remain responsible for infrastructural reform, for setting and enforcing the basic rules of the game, and for regulations.

This includes managing the political economy of reform as infrastructural reforms are political processes, prone to backlash. Governments also remain responsible for much of infrastructure finance as well as social goals.

Better expenditure allocation is also needed. In particular, not enough is being spent on maintenance.

Nevertheless, private investment is likely to remain an important component of infrastructural development in the years ahead, particularly as the available fiscal space in many countries remains limited. The important thing will be to channel private initiative where it has the greatest livelihood of being successful and to have realistic expectations as to what it can achieve.

If and when the above is strictly adhered to, a strong base must have been laid for infrastructural provision and maintenance in Nigerian cities when in the long run will ensure sustainable growth and economic development.

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