

URBAN POVERTY AND POOR HOUSING CONDITIONS IN BENIN CITY

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Abstract

Poor housing is a serious problem in Benin City. The Urban poor is seriously affected as they cannot afford decent housing. This paper examines housing problems and urban poverty with a view to proffer solutions.

Introduction

Sada (1978), has observed that about 65% of the houses in Benin City are sub-standard and about 8%, sub-human. Also, a survey by Adeniyi (1981), revealed that only two, out of ten major towns in Nigeria had up to 50% of their houses connected with pipe borne water; six of the towns had less than 16% of their houses with flush toilets. Similarly a study by Ozo (1984) on housing conditions and the urban poor in Benin City, ended with the following conclusion: The housing quality of the urban poor is low; and the proportion of income spent on housing is very high. Poverty finds expression in housing as well as the environment, and the poor may as a result, be forced into unsanitary environments (Ozo 1984). According to Onokerhoraye (1977), Benin rose from a divisional and provincial headquarters during the colonial period to its present status as Edo State capital. Thus, over the years, Benin has attracted a large number of people employed by state government. Further, some large-scale commercial and industrial establishments have been located in the town, resulting in rise of the population. One of the associated landuse problems relate to housing. Most houses in the built-up areas were built long before amenities such as water and electricity supply could be provided, hence a large number of people live in houses without essential amenities or in sub-standard houses due to overcrowding or low incomes. There is thus a deterioration in the housing conditions of most of the urban poor of the city. Imafidon et al (2008), opined that "poverty and underdevelopment in every facet of the Nigerian society is largely attributed to corruption" corruption leads to poverty in housing. Corruption is mainly a leadership problem in Nigeria. In light of the above, this paper aims at finding out the relation between Urban incomes and Housing conditions in Benin City; Use housing as a measure of urban poverty or prosperity; Highlight some of the poor housing conditions of the urban poor due to corruption; and finally make some recommendations to help reduce some of the housing problems and associated corruption in Nigeria. The paper concludes by proffering solutions to the identified problems.

Study Area.

The study area, Benin City - is the capital of Edo State and it is located at latitude 6°25^N and longitude. 5°30^E. The city covers over 18.311 acres out of total land area of 19/282 square / kilometers in Edo State. Since Benin City was made a state capital, there has been a steady rise in the population of the area. The 2006 Census puts the population figures for Edo State at 3,218, 332 Benin City is made up mainly of Oredo, Egor and Ikpoba Okha Local Government Areas, **The Concept of Poverty**

Poverty is a relative concept. According to Cullingworth (1973), the Fifth of Americans who were officially described in 1964 as living in poverty conditions, had an objective standard of living considerably higher than the average in many countries of the third world. This means that poverty can only be determined in relation to others.

•Still further, poverty connotes a relative lack of command over resource and access to opportunities. Ozo (1984), had rightly observed that poverty is a life situation - a state of the mind and perception of the self, relative to others. Thus, poverty is a multi-dimensional concept with economic, psychological and sociological content.

Poverty can also be dichotomized into two - Absolute and relative poverty. Absolute poverty is poverty that is highly degrading and insulting to mankind. Absolute poverty in measured by

poverty- line, or minimum social needs. On the other hand , relative poverty refers to poverty, relative to others. That is, one is only poor because one is living near or surrounded by very rich people. (Richardson (1978)

However, despite these different arrays of definitions concerning poverty, for the purpose of this paper, Urban poverty will be seen only in terms of poverty of incomes, hence poverty of housing.

The following table I clearly shows the Distribution of poverty (incomes) of Households in Benin City in 1981.

TABLE 1
Distribution of Income Among Households in Benin City

Income / month	Absolute	%
N	Frequency	
200	33	31.4
201 300	16	15.2
301 400	14	13.3
401 500	11	10.5
501 600	12	11.4
601 700	3	2.9
701 800	-	,
801 -- 900	5	4.8
901 1000	3	2.9
1,000 - 2.000	8	7.4
	1 05	1 00

Source: - Fieldwork (Ozo, 1981).

From the above table, it could be seen that 46.6% of urban household had income lower than N300.00. The assumption here therefore is that households with less than £4300.00. per month as income live in urban poverty in Benin. This is equality reflected in their housing condition as the lower the income, the poorer the housing conditions. Housing Conditions

Housing is defined as the totality of the residential environment (Sada, 1978). Some indices for measuring housing conditions are as follows:

- (a) Room Density per household;
- (b) Facilities present
- (c) Positioning of facilities
- (d) Quality - ventilation and sanitation of neighbourhood;
- (e) Rent.

According to Sada (1978), the Planning Act of 1959 provided general guidelines that minimum standard of housing should have:

- (a) At least a shower and a flush toilet;
- (b) Electric light;
- (c) Pipe-borne Water
- (d) Adequate ventilations;
- (e) Building materials of durable nature

Also, Sada (1978), cited the National Council on Housing as recommending that every household should possess;

- (a) One to three - bed seater room
- (b) A flush toilet and a shower;
- (c) A kitchen.

For the purpose of this paper, all households in Benin City having below the minimum housing requirements, prescribed by the National Council on Housing, shall be regarded as urban poor or living in urban poverty.

From the study by Sada (1978), it is revealed that: 42% of houses in Benin City are over 20 years old. Average rate of housing development is 4% per annum. Therefore, the housing industry in Benin is expanding less than the replacement rate.

The table 2 below shows the conditions of buildings in Benin (Sada 1978):

Table 2: Conditions of Buildings in Benin City

NEIGHBOURHOOD	A		C		D		D		TOTAL
UGBOWO	26.5	41.7	22.7		9.1	-			214
USELU	19.7	31.9	48.3	7.9	-			1082	
IKPOBA	36.2	21.8	40.6	1.3	-			458	
URUBI	16.3	36.3	43.5	4.0	-			1206	
UZEBU	13.7	31.0	50.0	4.7	0.6			576	
IDUMWUJ	14.9	42.9	39.3	3.1	0.4			448	
UHUMUW1	12.9	33.6	52.6	1.4	0.3			1332	
OLIHA	16.9	30.2	52.6	5.2	0.4			1582	
OGBELAKA	18.8	45.1	31.9	4.2				576	
ADESOGBE	31.8	26.8	32.2	9.2				478	
UGBEKUN	11.4	59.4	18.7	10.6				492	
IBIWE	6.4	22.4	70.2	0.7				362	
GRA/IYEKOB	29.6	35.9	25.2	9.4				218	
EWUAKPEN	19.8	40.7	39.5	-				334	
EUBUOGBA	14.2	46.0	39.5	0.7				287	
OKEDO	16.4	34.2	46.8	2.6	6.56			656	
IGU1SI	13.7	25.5	60.8	-				510	
IWEGIE	18.7	49.0	31.8	-	0.5			428	
EGUADASE	28.0	40.0	24.2	6.7				356	

OGBOKA	14.0	37.1	31.6	16.5	35.7			370	308
IGBESARO	24.7	30.5	9.0						
TOTAL NO.	2163	4265	5255	427				12,220	
TOTAL %	17.7	34.9	43			3.4	0.9		100.00

Source: 1972 Housing Survey (Sada, 1978)

- A = Modern Building with modern Amenities
- B = Good construction without modern Amenities.
- C Traditional building with water and electricity.
- D. Traditional building without water and light.

From the table 2. 7% of houses in Benin are standard; 78% sub-standard and 43% traditional buildings, later modernised but without amenities. The implication of the above figures is that many urban dwellers in Benin City live in sub-standard houses and therefore, in urban poverty.

Logically, since the urban dwellers are relatively few and can readily afford to stay in standard houses in healthy environments it stands to reason that only the urban poor are left to occupy

the substandard houses that form over 78% of all houses in Benin City. As has been shown earlier, 46.6% of urban households have small income per month, hence this income disparity between the rich and poor equally create a disparity in the choice of neighbourhood.

Corruption as a Factor in Mass Poverty

Many urban dwellers in Nigeria inhabit ghettos, slums and urban blight areas characterized by infrastructural decay and run-down neighbourhoods. Corruption is a factor in urban mass poverty.

According to Imafidon (2008), there is evidence of infrastructural decay in Nigeria due to embezzlement, misappropriation and misapplication of public funds by those entrusted with the leadership of the country. Corruption is complex. Corruption is a criminal, anti-social behaviour, where funds meant for a majority of the people are stolen by a few leaders. Some of these "leaders" stash this stolen money away in foreign accounts in countries such as Switzerland, Britain, e.t.c. Money meant for infrastructural development of Nigeria are stolen by fraudulent Nigerian leaders. The enormity of this problem of grafting led to the setting up of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). So many ex-governors in Nigeria are currently or trial in courts for stealing billions (even trillions) of Naira belonging to the Nigerian people.

Furthermore, Olaniya (2008) has argued that corruption is the abuse of power by a public official for private gain. Bolaji (1970) sees corruption as the act of money -taking to induce the receiver to carry out an action in favour of the giver who is not entitled to the benefits from that action. Corruption equally fakes place in public offices. This was probably why Nigeria, at a time, was labelled the third most corrupt country on earth..

Conclusively, it will be relevant to give instances of the high - level corruption in Nigeria (which also affect Benin City in Edo State) to buttress the fact that trillions of Naira that could have gone into housing projects for poor people, or empower these poor people economically and alleviate their poverty are stolen and wasted by leaders in Nigeria. Airabor, Imafidon and Idomeh (2008), have painted a picture of corruption in high places in Nigeria as follows:

- *> Tafa Balogun corruptly enriched himself with the sum of N17.7 billion (TELL News magazine April 18, 2008). Sacked as Inspector General of police, he was later tried and convicted.
- <*> Fabian Osuji was accused of giving N55 million. Prof. Osuji a former minister of education and was dismissed on account of this (TELL News magazine, April 18 2005). <*> Sunday E h in dero-immediate past inspector General of police was involved in a N21 million scandal (The Nation).
- *> Chuba Okadigbo was said to have embezzled N22.9 million (TELL Newsmagazine August 7, 2000).
- <*> Former Deputy Senate president Hamna Abubakar was reported to have embezzled N16.9 Million (TELL Newsmagazine, August 7,2000).
- <*> Navy Captain G. A. Ojedokun, Nigeria Defence Adviser to India was found with 2.2 million dollars at the airport (The Nation Newspaper).

The list of corrupt leaders in Nigeria is endless. Recently, former governors James Ibori (Delta State) and Lucky Igbinedion (Edo State.) are in court over charges of embezzlement of funds running into billions of Naira.

Recommendation and Conclusion

Poverty finds expression in the segregation of different social classes into different neighbourhoods.

To the extent that the differential incomes earned by the urban rich and urban poor lead to differential perception of neighbourhood,, and since the higher the income, the higher or better the residential housing that could be afforded, it means the rich urban dwellers will inhabit the more habitable parts of the city while the urban poor, with poor incomes, will inhabit the dirty residential

neighbourhoods, This is true in the case of Benin City. Thus, Housing is a measure of urban poverty or affluence,

Although there is a Town Planning Authority in Benin as in cases of Ibandan and Lagos, the constraints imposed by the present pattern of land ownership as well other socio-cultural and political factors, have reduced the effectiveness of the authority in the attempt to regulate land use development in the city (Onokerhoraye, 1977).

More importantly, corruption is a major factor that has inhibited socio-economic development in Nigeria, especially in the area of housing. The anticorruption institutions such as Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) should be strengthened in Nigeria. Bad government and associated corruption poor, with poor incomes, will inhabit the dirty residential neighbourhoods. This is true in the case of Benin City. Thus, Housing is a measure of urban poverty or affluence.

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More importantly, corruption is a major factor that has inhibited socio-economic development in Nigeria, especially in the area of housing. The anti-corruption institution's such as Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) should be strengthened in Nigeria. Bad government and associated corruption has intensified poverty in Nigeria to a level where people live and sleep under bridges.

Therefore, to solve the problems of overcrowding, deterioration of the urban physical landscape, inadequate circulatory systems and inadequate community facilities in poor residential neighbourhoods in Benin City, corruption should be curbed while government should be sensitive to the welfare and plight of the poor. Public housing schemes that are heavily subsidized by government for the poor should be built and executed in all Local Government Areas in Nigeria.

According to Onokerhoraye (1977), there should be Urban Renewal in poor neighbourhoods - retaining the best of existing development and part by part, excising the worst property in blocks of sufficient size to provide recreational and school facilities, drainage and more adequate vehicular and traffic access. This will help in reducing population - pressure on land. The poor people, thus displaced by such exercise can then be resettled in another part of the city.

Finally, the Government should give housing subsidy in form of loan to the urban poor (those receiving below N5,000 per month) to enable them purchase new house materials to replace old ones or provide essential social amenities in their houses. The government should provide social security for poor people in Nigeria. In the words of Onokerhoraye (1977), "property rehabilitation programmes in the slums of Nigeria cities can have a useful function since a fairly large proportion of housing in these areas can be improved by re-roofing, enlarging windows, painting and sanitary improvements".

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