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URBANIZATION AND FLOODING: STRATEGIES FOR COPING AMONG SLUM DWELLERS IN YENAGOA, BAYELSA STATE

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Abstract

The core Niger Delta with its low lands and rivers is well associated with annual floods and rainfalls throughout the year. The people have since built measures to enable them cope with these annual and/or year-round challenges. Yenagoa transformed from a rural settlement and attained the town status, following creation of Bayelsa State with Yenagoa as capital city in October 1, 1996. Yenagoa experiences both with annual flooding and rainfalls. The welcoming attitude of slum dwellers to relatives from the countryside, the ease with which one could acquire, rent land informally and the use of low cost/improvised materials for building one's home are incentives for slum living. In other to continue to live in the slum areas the people strive to provide several measures including construct of wooden bridges, improvised embankments and the building of cheap and affordable makeshift homes to overcome the challenges of flooding. The study sees the failure of government to properly plan and construct drainage systems over the years, as well as the behavior of residents who dispose their waste into the natural streams as major factors in the flooding of the city. The major occupants are low income, unemployed, underemployed and the Nigeria Police and other para-military personnel, while the property owners are petty businessmen, self-employed and middle class citizens. Provisions of low cost housing units, construction of roads with drainages and making land acquisition uncombersome will reduce slum dwelling in Yenagoa.

Keywords: Urbanization, Flooding, Strategies, Coping, Slum Dwellers

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INTRODUCTION

With industrialization and followed by urbanization many cities and towns soon experience one form of disaster or another. Two of such common disasters or challenges were growth of slums and flooding. While urbanization and industrialization are wide spread with both positive and

negative consequences, yet they have remained a welcome development. This is not so with flooding and the emergence of insanitary settlements or slums. Flooding is one of the most devastating and unwelcome natural and/or man-made occurrences, with its attendant effects of damage to property and lives, and displacement of people (Ologunorisa, 2011). In Nigeria many communities have suffered from one form of flooding or the other ranging from tidal, fluvial, flush, pluvial, etc. Floods have shattered both built environments and underdeveloped planes. One common feature of flooding is the non-discriminatory effects on both the poor and the rich, and visit whoever that does not recognize and/or prepare for it (Etuonovbe, 2011). Flooding is not a recent event as the Bible records that the first great flood occurred in Noah's time.

In Nigeria flooding has been an annual disaster among the lowland or wetland areas particularly in the raining season. While flooding occurs in both rural and urban areas, the effects on the rural areas are less reported due to the fact that many see this as usually and common occurrence until the 2009 and 2012 annual floods which wreaked havoc on many communities in various states, including places like Sokoto which hitherto never experienced floods of such magnitude. While flooding remains an annual disaster to some communities, there has been incessant increase in flooding in many urban slum settlements, particularly from rain and river water.

Slums have existed from the beginning of cities and industrialization (Booth, 1903) and both the developed and developing world have fair share of slum growth at various time periods. Historically, the word 'slum' was used as English slang referring to various taverns, eating homes, 'low frequent parts of towns', 'bad housing' as an alternative description for rookeries (Dyos & Cannadine, 1982).

The UN defines slums as wide ranging low income settlements and/or poor human living conditions with vast informal human settlements which have become the visual expressions of urban poverty. Slum has been used mainly to describe people living under substandard conditions of squalor (Mahabir et al., 2016). Slums are neglected parts of cities where housing and living conditions are poor (Cities Alliance, 2006). A highly populated and closely packed urban residential area with deteriorating or incomplete infrastructure and inhabited mainly by impoverished people. In whatever way we may describe slums they remain areas where people settle without formal approvals from planning authorities and usually with make-shift or dilapidated housing and so continually suffer from the risk or threat of being evicted or overrun by floods.

On the other hand, urbanization is the process whereby the migration from rural areas into towns increases the population of such areas. This predominantly increases in physical and social growth of urban areas both horizontally and vertically (Science Daily). Wikipedia notes that urbanization remains the process where cities and towns are formed and increases in size and complexity as more and more persons live and work permanently. Some urban areas are deliberately planned, while others emerge accidentally. The Encyclopedia Britannica defines the process by which large numbers of people become permanently concentrated in relatively small areas forming cities as urbanization.

Statement of the Problem

Flooding has been a perennial life threatening event and so every normal individual would avoid areas prone to floods, yet many more move into such flood plains annually in our urban towns. Again, slums remain disadvantaged sections of towns or cities and usually lacking in basic

necessities, overcrowded, prone to crimes or perceived as centres of crime by the law enforcement agencies, and people living outside these areas. These disparaging descriptions however have not deterred people from moving to such areas in town or to be first accommodated there by friends and relatives before finding appropriate housing. What could have been responsible for flooding in urban areas and how can the authorities tackle this menace; who owns the house and/or resides here and what do they do to cope with the flooding year in year out and how can the plight of these ‘forgotten’ urban residents be assuaged in the city of Yenagoa forms the basis of this paper.

Objectives of the Study

The overriding objective of the study is to investigate into the intricacies of urban flooding and mechanism for survival in these unfortunate terrains. Specifically, the study wants to:

- Assess the causal factors for flooding in Yenagoa.
- Examine the reasons for the ever increasing population of slum areas in Yenagoa.
- Identify the categories of people living/owning houses in the slums.
- The mechanisms for survival by residents in these ‘threatened’ slum environments.

Research Questions

- What is responsible for the constant flooding in parts of Yenagoa?
- What factors are responsible for the increasing population in the slum areas of Yenagoa?
- Who are the occupants and house owners in the slum areas?
- What strategies do slum dwellers invent to overcome the challenges associated with slum dwelling?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The concept of urbanization, slum and flooding may mean different things to different people. Lacking in precise meaning, the social science concepts entail vagaries of meanings and many see their occurrence, usage and significance differently. The concept of slum though evolved over the years yet lack acceptable common meaning. Despite its wide usage the word ‘slum’ is loosely used in many parlances and connotes different meanings. Thus, the generalized way in which the term is used to describe conditions in the so called slums is inappropriate, though they may be reflections of the conditions of the poor and the ‘uncared’ for or marginalized urban populations the world over (Teklemarina, 2018). This is because not all slum areas are rife with crimes, disease unsafe water, poor housing and/or flooded. The differences in slum characteristics also make for the varying names they are called in different nations/languages favelas (Brazil), ghettos (US), barriers (Mexico), shanties (Jamaica), mabandas (Tanzania) (Teklemarian, 2018).

UN Habbitat (2012) in its world urbanization prospects report of 2018 estimated that the world’s population living in urban areas would be 55 percent of the world population, with a 65 percent increase in the projected population by 2050 (Teklemarian, 2018). This is clearly threatening as it is worrisome, that hitherto rural communities are being urbanized and that infrastructures are lacking to cope with this ever increasing urban human population, yet these factors compel many to live and die in environments that forces a person to rely on nature and,

people for survival (Abheuer, Thiele-Eich & Braun, 2013). Urbanization was not one of the challenges of Nigerian towns and villages prior to colonial rule though Nigeria had several cities of different sizes of great importance such as Lagos, Ibadan, Ilorin, Kano, Zaria, Onitsha, Aba, Port Harcourt, Calabar, etc. These towns had their different social and cultural identities peculiar to their locations, yet the movement from the rural to urban areas was relatively low and quite insignificant until the arrival of colonial system (Oni-Jimoh & Liyange, 2019).

Urbanization is a population shift to urban areas by rural people, resulting in the increase in urban population and decrease in rural population (Wikipedia). The process in which cities grow in higher percentage of the population due to rural people coming to live in a town is referred to as urbanization (National Geographic Research Library). Here urbanization could be a fast increasing population of a town due to emigration. Several factors may be responsible for a society to transform from an urban status. It could occur through planning, the result of human action, state actions or both. (WHO, 2010; Ganj, 2012). Many slums in Lagos, Nigeria sprouted due to neglect and colonial policies (Bigon, 2008). Many cities came through deliberate planning by authorities for specific purpose yet others may be due to growing business activities as a result of being a town becoming major transport route or terminal. Similarly, the neglect of rural communities could spur people to relocate to towns to take advantage of dreamed opportunities

The UN Habitat (2012) believes that to achieve 'cities without slums' governments must take serious action in addressing urban challenges through urban planning, infrastructural provision, and slums upgrade system, city management and poverty alleviation (UN Habitat, 2007). Similarly, Lessinger (1962) notes that urban infrastructural facilities such as urban mass transit system, motorways, affordable housing, etc. resulted in disappearance of slums in many US and European cities in the decade 1960s to 1970s.

Slums growth in urban areas has been on the increase particularly in Third World nations (World Bank, 2009). Many factors have been responsible for increase in slum settlement such as rising population, increased demand for urban formal in informal services, shortage of habitable low-cost housing units within the reach of the poor as well as absence or non-implementation of mechanisms to regulating the emergence of slum settlements (Daniel, et al, 2015).

One way of reducing slums in any city is also the provision of affordable public mass transit system which enables the low-income groups to access the industrial and city centres to earn a living and the replacement of slums with the provision of habitable low cost homes for occupation by the poor (Roberts, 2005). Where effective transportation system exists many commuters would stay at the suburbs since they could access the industrial locations, offices and city centre with ease. Slums are urban residential areas usually highly populated and consisting of closely packed housing units that are decrepit, deteriorating or uncompleted urban infrastructure occupied primarily by the poor (UN Habitat, 2007). It is also part of a city where housing quality is bad and living conditions are poor (Caves, 2004). The UN Habitat (2012) reports that by 2012, 863 million people representing 33 percent of developing countries' urban population find residence in slums. Though slums differ in size and complexity, yet most have features of lack of satisfactory sanitation system, absence of potable water supply, unreliable power supply, law enforcement/security challenges, lacking permanence in land ownership and lack of basic services expected in urban settings (Habitat, 2012).

Flooding is associated with related problems of climate change, topography, hydrological and biological factors. Nevertheless, Zhang, Ma and Wang (2008) reported that worldwide, floods are directly related to topological, climatic, meteorological, hydrological and biological factors, but that human activities may change the hydrological processes and increase in food

production. Floods unleash damage through moving water and the deposition of debris, dirt and nutrients when flooding ends. The debris could be poisonous to the environment or source of nutrients for crops. Floods occur when water from various sources accumulates and permeates surfaces which cannot readily evaporate (Mwape, 2009). Flooding is an excess of water on hitherto dry land or an overflow of water in a river, drainage or stream (Merriam-Webster, 2012). Many slum areas are annual flooded yet the people remain undeterred.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Table 1: Causal Factors for flooding in Yenagoa

S/N	Variables	Freq.	%
	Lacking of proper planning and enforcement by government	171	57.77
	Naturally lowlands	153	51.69
	Blockage of water drainage channels by residents	233	78.72
	Availability of many undeveloped sites	41	13.85
	Predominance of batcher houses	67	22.64
	Lack of environmental regulations/lawlessness by residents	111	37.50
	Existence of many water channels/streams	44	14.86

The above table shows that respondents indicated that the greatest factor for flooding in Yenagoa was the blockage of drainage channels by residents (233 or 78.72%). This was followed by lack of proper planning and enforcement by government (171 or 57.77%). A third rated factor resulting in flooding in Yenagoa was the natural lowland (wetland) nature of the environment (153 or 51.69%), while the fourth factor was lack of environmental regulations/lawlessness on the part of residents. Thus, factors making for flooding are both natural and man-made, including failure of government to take action to regulate certain activities of the citizenry.

Table 2: Factors responsible for increasing slum population

High cost of accommodation in Yenagoa	221	74.66
Easy acquisition/rent of land/houses	177	59.80
Secure from police harassment	23	07.77
First port of call for many new arrival from the countryside	89	30.07
Low rents in slum areas	117	39.53

Table 2 indicates that the continued increase in slum population results from the high cost of accommodation, which is beyond affordability by average income earners and other low income residents. A similar factor was the ease with which people acquire land space or rent make-shift houses in slum areas, usually without the knowledge of planning authorities. This was also followed by low rents in these slum areas as compared to other parts of town. This means owning or renting accommodation in slum areas was affordable to majority of the low income earners. The culture of readily accommodating relatives who visit among the lower class segments of society was also one major factor, as many of such visitors may not be welcome by their high class relatives living in the highbrow areas. This finding is in tandem with Oni-Jimoh and Liyanage (2018) that migrants who are unable to afford high rents in urban owns often develop shanties in and around city centers and suburbs with unclaimed or vacant parcels of lands which result into slums.

Table 3: Categories of People living/owning houses in slums in Yenagoa

	Freq.	%
a. Occupants		
Low income earners	79	26.69
Medium income earners	141	47.64
High income earners	62	20.95
Police and para-military personnel	87	29.39
Unemployed/underemployed	119	40.20
b. House owners		
Civil servants	61	20.61
Political class	33	11.15
Petty Businessmen	87	29.39
Self-employed	116	39.19
Underemployed/Unemployed	168	63.51

Table 3 addresses the categories of people who own houses in the slum areas as well as the major occupants. It showed that the major occupants are medium income earners (47.64%), low income earners (26.96%) and the unemployed/underemployed (40.20%). Surprising, members of the Nigeria police force and other para-military personnel were rated as the fourth largest occupants of slum areas. The fact is that they are part of the Nigeria urban working class whose earnings are on the lower side.

On the other hand, ownership of slum houses in Yenagoa indicates that the underemployed/unemployed (63.51%), self-employed (39.19%) and petty businessmen and women (29.39%) are the major owners. The involvement of the political class was negligible (11.15%), while some civil servants (20.61%) also owned slum houses, which are often non-standard and hardly built to specification.

Table 4: Coping Strategies of Slum dwellers in Yenagoa

	Freq.	%
Construction of wooden bridges	268	90.54
Construction of Embankments	101	34.12
Construction of concrete/tarred roads	63	21.28
Provision of vigilance service	71	23.99
Construction of make-shift houses	210	70.95
Formation of Pressure groups	24	08.11

Table 4 answers the question as to what slum dwellers in Yenagoa do to overcome their challenges. One major strategy was the construction of wooden bridges (90.53%) popularly called ‘money bridges’ as a way out to help themselves to continue to live there. Another is construction of make-shift houses (70.95%) which are amenable to frequent repairs/modifications as well as relocation due to low cost of building materials or use of improvised materials or other materials picked up from dump sites. They also construct embankments to save their homes from being washed away by flood waters. However, they are little known for formation of pressure groups (8.11%) and vigilante services (23.99%) as well as construct of concrete or tarred roads (31.28%) which connections they may not have to timely get approval from the authorities.

CONCLUSION

The growth of slums is associated with high population movements into towns from the countryside. Section 41 of the Nigerian Constitution empowers every citizen to unrestricted movement and residence within Nigeria. With no proper regulations or lack of enforcement many move into vacant lands and already existing slum areas where land could easily be rented for as little as nothing. Thus, many migrants from rural areas relocate to Yenagoa, the capital city of Bayelsa State find solace in the urban slums. Factors responsible for the emergence and sustenance of slum settlements include: lack of proper planning and management, existence of naturally lowlands, blockage of existing drainages by residents, as well as lack of environmental regulations and lawlessness are some factors responsible for frequent flooding in slum areas of Yenagoa.

Many residents also move into the slum areas due to the high cost of housing in town, the ease with which one can acquire land to build makeshift homes as well as low rents. The occupants of the slum settlements are mainly the low income earners, middle income earners, the unemployed as well as members of the Nigeria Police and other para-military agencies, yet the homes are owned by petit businessmen, self-employed and a few middle class citizens living outside the area. With the perennial flooding of the areas the people built wooden bridges (money bridges), construction of improvised embankments and building of mainly temporary homes amenable to repairs as measure to cope with their plight. Provision of low cost houses, construction of standard roads with drainages, making land acquisition non-cumbersome and provision of council houses will reduce slum dwelling in Yenagoa.

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