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# The African Government Abandonment and The Negative Socioeconomic Effects

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In Africa, places like Lagos, shantytowns like Soweto, and Ajegunle which is a neighborhood located in the heart of Lagos have been ignored and forgotten by the local and state governments. Such intentional abandonment, a result of colonialism, race intolerance, and class differences, has negatively affected people's socioeconomic status.

Lagos is a city that is rapidly becoming a megacity with over fifteen million inhabitants. Perceptions about life in Lagos change depending on people's personal experiences. For Stephen Omojoro, a taxi driver, many "people in


Lagos sleep where they work” and the city “has been deteriorating.”<sup>1</sup> For others, Lagos is where you thrive and jobs and educational opportunities are available. Unfortunately, the government’s withdrawal from Lagos caused this city to be, as Rem Koolhaas said, “blank on a map,”<sup>2</sup> in other words nonexistent. The government decided that shantytowns as well as other places in Lagos should not be recognized on any maps much less be taken care of. It is key to understand that being publicly forgotten and intentionally erased from Africa’s map contributes to taking people’s agency away, to the increase in poverty, social injustices, etc. A huge contributing factor to the government’s stance results from colonialism. Africa was colonized by various powers, one of them being Britain. The British planted their beliefs on class differences, racial division, and intolerance. As a result, places like Soweto and Ajegunle were purposefully destined by the state to mark class distinctions, racial division, and occupational differences. Sadly, the government's stance lasted decades even after famous writers and impresarios like Stewart Brand analyzed Nigeria’s situation and saw “the explosive growth of ‘aspirational shantytowns’ [as] the cure for Third World poverty and an extraordinary profit-making opportunity.”<sup>3</sup> The people living in shantytowns, Lagos, and other marginalized neighborhoods would have liked to be in the government’s radar to at least show them how they have thrived and created

communities from the bottom-up without their intervention nor support—it is indeed an accomplishment.


The many negative socioeconomic impacts that individuals have had to face, due to the country's leadership, are incredibly heartbreaking and difficult to understand. Job opportunities, crime, living conditions, infrastructure, and much more have been going downhill since the government forgot about places like Lagos, Soweto, and Ajegunle. For instance, Soweto was intentionally established by the state to “house” but in reality, to hide and push out workers, immigrants, and miners from the city. The working class was forced to move to the worst sector where there was absolutely nothing. Soweto was the only place where black people could legally settle, there was no state money, it was not connected to state infrastructure, there was no electricity, no housing, and the list kept on going. Unfortunately, “the absence of government services [...] forces slum dwellers to become self-sufficient through illegal activity”<sup>4</sup> which explains the high crime rates, for instance, “your house can be broken into by force [and they will] remove of all your valuable property.”<sup>5</sup>


When the government chooses to ignore and stop helping and providing for its citizens; the people choose to not sit around with their arms crossed. Lagos, Soweto, and the neighborhood of

Ajegunle were not the exception. Fortunately, people today are “innovative, they are ready to adapt, they are ready to fight, they are ready to live in different kind of conditions.”<sup>6</sup> People have come up with ways to bring some sort of regulation or laws to their communities since there is no government presence. There are people who are chosen to be “local regulators” so they have the authority to monitor, maintain order, aid, and guide the people. Furthermore, people have come up with a way to self-organize their spaces, houses, buildings, etc. Rem Koolhaas described it as the “collective adaptation to extreme hardship”<sup>7</sup> which is not a too-far-from-reality interpretation of people’s socioeconomic difficulties in Africa.

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