



Buses drive through crowded Oshodi market. Lagos is Nigeria's largest city and among the top nine emerging mega-cities in the world. Its population has grown from 300,000 in 1950 to more than 12 million today. It is an urban planner's nightmare: There is no mass transit system and its roads are congested daily by more than one million vehicles. Millions of commuters are trapped for hours, most of them sweltering inside crowded minivan taxis. Beggars and children add to the chaos by moving with the traffic to hawk their wares.

Image: Pius Otomi Ekpei / courtesy of AFP

governance and planning

lagos: crisis of management

More than 65 percent of those who migrate to Lagos end up living below the national poverty line, only marginally better than the national average of 70 percent. Migrants usually live in one of the city's 200 slums, which range in size from clusters of shacks to entire districts. It is these people, currently living in wretched conditions, who suffer more if governments are unable or unwilling to put human and financial resources into planning for the future and improving governance.

Since 2000, the mega-city of Lagos has been drawing in an estimated 600,000 people per year, most of whom end up in slums. As in many fast-growing cities, the proliferation of slums and the influx of so many people has put a tremendous strain on the government's ability to provide basic services. A combination of difficult terrain and many years of economic crisis, misrule and corruption¹ have turned Lagos into a governance nightmare.

There is no mass transit system, and millions of commuters are trapped for hours, most of them sweltering inside crowded minivan taxis. Beggars and children move through the traffic, hawking water, electronic gadgets, medicines, food, clothes, toys, music cassettes, sunglasses, pens, shoes and picture frames. There is no proper sewage network, and safe drinking water is available only

to a small number of people. A regular power supply has been described as a 'distant dream', and in heavy rains many homes are flooded.

"Lagos is one of those places where you wonder just how anything manages to function," said one BBC correspondent, echoing the view of many who visit or live in Nigeria's capital.

City governance impacts inhabitants, especially the urban poor, in a way that does not compare with more self-sufficient and remote rural areas. Indeed, almost all aspects of urban development – employment and job creation; public transport and traffic; solid-waste collection and disposal; water and sanitation; health services; shelter and housing – hinge on the issue of governance.

In Lagos, city management is compromised by the influence of informal relationships. "Land rights, employment, industry and other sources of wealth rely on political interaction, involving patron-client relations, bribery, corruption, nepotism and/or 'long-legs' (contacts). Almost everyone knows someone with a link, however tenuous, to power [...]. There is considerable interaction (some would say interference) between leaders at national, state and local levels and at least some sectors of the general public..."²

These informal relationships give rise to social inequity, ethnic tensions and political instability. Without effective government the entire concept of rights disappears. "[Unless] concerted action is taken to redress urban inequalities, cities may well become the predominant sites of deprivation, social exclusion and instability worldwide," according to UN-HABITAT.³ Many argue that Lagos has already reached this state. Its future – and the lives of millions of its residents – depends on sustainable urbanisation and poverty reduction. Good governance is fundamental to this task.

Lagos: the fastest growing mega-city in the world

Lagos is the largest city in Nigeria. It is the main city of Lagos State and Nigeria's main commercial centre, with more than 70 percent of the nation's industries and economic activities carried out there. The city is also important to the rest of West Africa as a leading regional port and manufacturing centre with the highest number of multinational companies.

Worldwide, Lagos features among the top nine emerging mega-cities, including Delhi, Dhaka, Jakarta, Mexico City, Mumbai, New York, São Paulo and Tokyo. Its population has grown from 300,000 in 1950 to more than 12 million today. With an annual population growth rate of 4.8 percent, it is estimated that Lagos will be inhabited by more than 20 million people by 2020 and thereby join the ranks of a growing number of "hyper-cities".

Confined to only 3,345sqkm, Lagos covers just 0.4 percent of Nigeria's entire land area, making it the smallest of the country's 36 states. However, it has the greatest number of inhabitants, representing 10 percent of the country's population.

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Transportation

People in Lagos depend on private cars, buses and taxis to get around. Every day, some one million vehicles congest approximately 2,600km of roads. "Lagos is unbearable! People are living in traffic!" exclaimed one desperate inhabitant in a recent Internet posting.

In a 2005 study by the Lagos Metropolitan Transport Authority (LAMATA), the main instrument for transforming the state transport system, road traffic was identified as the main source of air pollution in Lagos State, having "catastrophic" health implications.⁴

The concentration of carbon monoxide and sulphur dioxide in the air acts as an irritant to those suffering from lung diseases and can cause fatigue, loss of vision, headaches and nausea. "We can safely conclude that the cost of pollution in metropolitan Lagos has increased medical costs such as medicines and hospital visits and on productivity losses," the study found.⁵

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In addition to posing a health threat, public transport deficiencies further impoverish the urban poor: LAMATA estimates that transportation costs account for 20 percent of household budgets, second only to food.⁶

The problem with infrastructure is nothing new. In Lagos, "the colonial state apparatus and its post-colonial successors never succeeded in



Women carrying household necessities over a bridge in one of Lagos, Nigeria's 200 slums, which range in size from clusters of shacks to entire districts. In Lagos – a region of mangrove swamp, rivers and lagoons – water covers more than 40 percent of the entire area. Still, the majority of slum dwellers do not have access to clean water. Another great challenge facing the Lagos planners is housing and shelter since most available land is frequently taken over in uncontrolled and unplanned developments. The urban poor live in wretched conditions and are likely to continue in hardship if governments are unable or unwilling to put resources into planning for their future as part of an 'inclusive' city.

Image: Lionel Healing / courtesy of AFP



When planning for the delivery of basic services to slum dwellers, cities and utility companies must take into account the huge number of households and businesses who gain free access illegally. In Delhi, India, so many people tap into otherwise legitimate electrical lines that little or no effort is made to hide it. When an inspector of a local power company cuts power, it is only a temporary delay. Shortly after the inspector's departure, the lines are hooked up again.

Image: Chris Horwood / IRIN



In Lagos, Nigeria, money that might have been invested in healthcare, housing or physical infrastructure were allegedly diverted. Now, the city must find new solutions to old problems: air pollution caused by road traffic has severe health implications, particularly for the urban poor who cannot afford healthcare.

Image: Stuart Franklin / Magnum

building a fully functional metropolis through investment in the built environment or the construction [...] Vast quantities of capital that might have been invested in health care, housing or physical infrastructure were either consumed by political and military elites or transferred to overseas bank accounts with the connivance of Western financial institutions."⁷

In addition to corruption and lack of political will, poor governance is a major obstacle to transport agencies in developing cities. The fragmentation and duplication of institutional responsibilities and

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lack of coordination among agencies and ministries compounds the problem: In Lagos, for example, at least three agencies in addition to LAMATA are responsible for traffic and transport issues at the state level.⁸

Environmental sanitation

Lagos has often been referred to as the one of the dirtiest cities in the world.

The capital city lacks an effective refuse-collection service and has no central system for treating sewage and industrial effluent. Filling the vacuum are self-employed collectors who push carts through the streets, collecting rubbish from residents for a fee. Similarly, private operators evacuate sewage for city residents. Of some 6,000 tons of waste generated daily, only 3,000 tons are taken to three official dump sites by government-appointed refuse collectors and informal collectors, according to the World Bank.

Lagos health and environment officials acknowledge that most of the rubbish and sewage collected by private operators, as well as the industrial effluent, ends up in the lagoons and creeks. Much of the rest is burned in illegal rubbish dumps or in one of three official dumping sites.

Untreated sewage pollutes the lagoon and destroys marine and aquatic life, said Kenneth Iwugo, a Nigerian marine scientist affiliated with the

University of Bristol who studied water pollution in Lagos. Where rubbish and other solid waste are dumped in officially appointed landfills, contaminants leak into ground and surface water, he said.

In Makoko slum, residents use small enclosures attached to their shelters as toilets and bathrooms. All waste is dumped into the same lagoon where they fish. There are pit toilets in areas of the settlement lying on firmer ground, but each one serves several families.

Lagos is particularly susceptible to water pollution because the water table is very shallow, sometimes only three metres from the surface, Iwugo said. In addition, the relatively loose and easily permeable soil allows the infiltration of contaminants. These environmental factors affect the food source and pose a significant risk of viral and bacterial diseases such as polio, meningitis, diarrhoea, cholera, parasitic infection and fevers spread by waterborne vectors.

Shelter and housing

Another great challenge is housing and shelter, particularly for people living in overcrowded slums. Official estimates put the population density of metropolitan Lagos at 1,308 per square kilometre, but in heavily built-up areas the average density reaches 20,000 per square kilometre.

The housing demand is unparalleled in any other part of Nigeria, and most available land in Lagos falls prey to unregulated and unplanned development. According to a 1978 law, all land in Nigeria is vested in the government.⁹ However, traditional land rights are also recognised, which often leads to conflicting tenure claims and disputes. Insecure land tenure has helped spawn the many slums occupied by squatters, who, without a legal title to land, are unable to take out mortgages. Housing in the illegal slums is rent-free, but the trade-off is insecurity and poor or no amenities.

Informal settlements are absolutely off the radar in terms of infrastructure, services and future planning, except perhaps in terms of planning to remove them. In the name of security or economic development, a succession of governments has resorted to demolition as a solution to slum proliferation. These forced evictions make hundreds

of thousands of urban poor destitute overnight, as they immediately decamp to another, probably more marginal and inappropriate piece of land.

By the beginning of the 1990s, the most well-known slum in Lagos was Maroko, where some one million people lived in makeshift squalor next to the residential district of Victoria Island. In 1991 Raji Rasaki, then-military governor of Lagos, gave Maroko residents two weeks to move and, when the deadline passed, promptly sent in bulldozers to demolish the shantytown, ignoring a public outcry. None of the residents were resettled or compensated. Illustrating the common trend of 'spatial exclusion' – where the urban poor are driven out of town centres, allowing real estate values to soar – the area has since been taken over by wealthier residential developments and shopping malls, all of which are well-provided with basic services.

Following this precedent, demolition has become a frequent recourse for local authorities, who are often beholden to land speculators keen to cash in on the acute land scarcity of Lagos. In the past two years, parts of the Ijora-Badiya and Makoko slums also fell to bulldozers.

According to a joint study by Tunde Agbola and Elijah Agunbiade (two Nigerian researchers linked respectively to the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, and the University of Lagos), summary state-implemented evictions are unlikely to amount to any lasting solution. They call for "a vision of how to regularise the city's informal settlements and develop an inclusive city for all its citizens."

In an attempt to address the crisis of urbanisation in Lagos State, authorities have launched a Lagos Metropolitan Development and Governance Project backed with a US\$200 million World Bank loan approved in March 2006. The World Bank currently has 22 active projects in Nigeria with a total commitment value of \$2.2 billion, and the governance project is one of the highest valued active projects.¹⁰ According to Deepali Tewari, the bank's senior municipal development specialist overseeing the project, the "objective is to increase sustainable access to basic urban services through investments in critical infrastructure."

Good governance is the essential first step towards alleviating poverty in the crowded slums of Lagos.

Under this initiative, nine of the biggest slums in Lagos will be rebuilt; the city's drainage system will be reconstructed to provide a long-term solution to perennial flooding; and infrastructure will be upgraded for the management of solid waste. Funding will also be devoted to improving public governance and the institutional capacity to identify and prioritise the most pressing needs of the city.

Good governance is the essential first step towards alleviating poverty in the crowded slums of Lagos. Years of economic crisis, corruption, the fragmentation and duplication of responsibilities, and the intrusion of informal relationships into the government's work have conspired to make daily life a misery for the burgeoning number of urban poor in Lagos. Even with adequate funding, sustainable improvement will be impossible without the political will to abandon corrupt practices and institute careful, appropriate planning.



Above: Shibam, Yemen – the ‘Manhattan of the desert’ in Yemen started 2000 years ago. Below: Mexcalitán in Mexico, said by some to be the birthplace of the Aztecs. Urban settlements are neither new nor are they destined to be chaotic centres of deprivation. The key issues are management, good governance and planning underwritten by political will.

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(www.yannarthusbertrand.org / www.goodplanet.org)





Tensions run deep as policemen break up a demonstration by residents of Mathare slum in Nairobi, Kenya, on 31 July 2007. The demonstrations were organised after authorities disconnected an illegally connected water source, which left slum dwellers without water for a few days. Around the world, the majority of people living in slums have no access to basic services.

Water and electricity are particularly hot commodities, compelling people to illegally tap sources. Although the demand for basic services is a legitimate one, city officials must navigate a path through legitimate demands and illegality.

Image: Julius Mwelu / IRIN