

# **The Urban Poor, the Informal City and Environmental Health Policy in Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

The main policy challenge addressed by the paper is how to support and regulate the urban informal sector in a way that promotes shelter and livelihood for the poor, and at the same time ensures a safe, healthy and socially acceptable environment; how to ensure that the struggle against urban poverty and slum dwelling does not result in blaming the victims, or in a campaign against the urban poor and slum dwellers themselves. The paper examines how urban poverty and the informal city have developed in Nigeria over the last 50 years; the extent to which government policies and programs have helped or constrained the poor, and how these slums and irregular settlements can be upgraded and progressively integrated into the urban mainstream. It considers how housing and planning codes, standards and regulations inherited from the discriminatory policies and segregationist practices of the colonial period have continued to inhibit the access of the poor to affordable housing and tenure security; how the inadequate provision of water, sanitation and waste management has led to the spread of a wide variety of water-borne and filth-related disease. The concluding section considers the essential elements of a strategy to improve the informal sector and the conditions of the poor, paying particular attention to the roles which state and local authorities, the international development community and the urban poor themselves could play in a collaborative effort to build safer, healthier, more inclusive and more equitable cities.

## **Introduction**

Poverty alleviation dominates the international development agenda of the 21st century, and one of the primary concerns of the Millennium Development Goals is to urgently improve the health and living conditions of millions of slum dwellers around the world. (UN-Habitat 2003). Up to the 1980s poverty was largely associated with the rural areas in developing countries; but the situation has changed with the dramatic increase in the numbers and proportion of the population living in urban areas, and a corresponding increase in the level of urban poverty. The ILO estimates that the proportion of the urban work force engaged in the informal sector is highest in sub-Saharan Africa, and accounts for more than 50 per cent of urban employment in two-thirds of the countries surveyed in 1999 (Population Reports 2002). These slums and irregular settlement have become so pervasive in Africa that they now outnumber legally planned developments, and their social legitimacy appears to be no longer in question; but the appalling environmental conditions associated with them constitute a major threat to the health and well-being of the urban community. The urban setting has many potential

health advantages because it reduces the unit cost of providing good quality water supply, sanitation, drainage and preventive and curative health care; but without these essential prerequisites, concentrating people and their wastes in crowded slums would certainly increase health risks and the spread of infectious and parasitic disease. As the World Health Organisation has emphasised, it is the home not the clinic that holds the key to a better health delivery system.

The main policy challenge addressed by the paper is how to support and regulate the urban informal sector in a way that promotes shelter and livelihood for the poor, and at the same time ensures a safe, healthy and socially acceptable environment; how to ensure that the struggle against urban poverty and slum dwelling does not result in a campaign against the urban poor and slum dwellers. The paper examines how urban poverty and the informal city have developed in Nigeria over the last 50 years; the extent to which government policies and programs have helped or constrained the poor, and how these slums and irregular settlements can be upgraded and progressively integrated into the urban mainstream. It considers how housing and planning codes, standards and regulations inherited from the discriminatory policies and segregationist practices of the colonial period have continued to inhibit the access of the poor to affordable housing and tenure security; how the inadequate provision of water, sanitation and waste management has led to the spread of a wide variety of water-borne and filth-related disease such as diarrhea, typhoid and cholera; the various forms of ill-health associated with malarial mosquitoes and other pests and disease vectors; the problems of malnutrition and food contamination, especially in the fast growing street food and catering industry; and the high incidence of respiratory infections among women and children, caused by indoor pollution from open cooking fires and stoves.

Attention is drawn to the health disparities between the rich and poor areas of the cities, and to the equity implications of such repressive government policies as the so-called "War Against Environmental Indiscipline" under the Military in the 1980s, and the more recent forced eviction of over 300,000 inhabitants of Maroko in Lagos Island by the Lagos State Government. The paper also discusses the more pragmatic policies of the 1990s to support the poor through the establishment of the National Directorate of Employment to promote skills training and self-employment, and the setting up of Community and Peoples Banks to provide micro-credit and other forms of financial and business services. The aim is to identify the lessons that could help to promote a more positive view and policy regarding the urban poor and the informal city.

The concluding section considers the essential elements of a strategy to improve the informal sector and the conditions of the poor, paying particular attention to the roles which state and local authorities, the international development community and the urban poor themselves could play in a collaborative effort to build safer, healthier, more inclusive and more equitable cities. For this the paper explores the

UN conferences of the 1990s, especially the urban dimension of Agenda 21 of the Rio Earth Summit, and the Habitat Agenda of the Istanbul City Summit which advocate the principles of enablement, decentralisation and partnership as essential for improved urban governance and sustainable urban development. It also draws from such other global initiatives as the WHO's Healthy Cities Programmes, and the Cities Alliance for Cities Without Slums sponsored by the World Bank, the UN-Habitat and other development partners that propose effective ways to ensure more inclusive and equitable cities, and adequate shelter for all. The paper suggests that what is needed for sustainable urbanisation is not less government, less control, or mindless deregulation of economic and planning activities, but rather a more enlightened, more participatory, and more equitable form of state intervention that would eliminate needless restrictions, and provide a more appropriate and flexible regulatory framework that is compatible with local conditions and yet reasonably efficient and environmentally responsible. We shall point out ways to reconcile the 'informal' and the 'formal' city, and how the positive attributes of the informal sector and other non-formal institutions of civil society can be harnessed and enlisted in the current campaign for good governance, poverty reduction and economic recovery in Nigeria.

### **Policy issues and debates**

Opinions differ widely on what the appropriate attitudes and policies towards the informal sector and the poor should be. Some of the more optimistic advocates of the informal sector tend to present it in romantic terms as a form of popular development, a vital source of employment and income for the poor, the seedbed of local entrepreneurship, and a potent instrument in the campaign to combat poverty and social exclusion (Danida 1997; De Solo 1989, 2000). They dismiss earlier characterisation of the sector as easy to enter, requiring little money and skills, and such other assumptions which led to the misconception that the sector required no form of official support. They also condemn the large number of regulations and bureaucratic procedures from the different institutions and levels of government which tend to stifle entrepreneurship, and to inhibit the realisation of the full potential of the informal sector (Durand-Lasserve et al. 2002; McAuslan 1987, 1992).

On the other hand critics, including many planners and government authorities, dismiss the sector as an anomaly, a source of disorder, and an obstacle to the development of a modern economy (Abumere et al. 1998; Sachs 1997). They condemn the slums, health risks, insecurity and exploitation associated with the sector, and hope that like other transitory phases in the course of development, the sector will wither away with time and economic progress. Even those who idealise the sector recognise that it is at best a mixed blessing. "In-so-far as informal sector activities do not respect legal, social, health and quality standards, and furthermore do not pay tax, they violate the rules of fair competition" (Sachs 1997). Indeed they argue that the sector has run its course, is now saturated, and may just be replicating the disguised unemployment that prevails in the rural areas. These conflicting

positions pose a difficult dilemma for planners and policy makers, and tend to reinforce the ambivalence and hostility of official attitudes towards the sector. If the informal sector thrives because of its informality, and because rules and regulations are minimal, does it make sense to try to formalise and integrate it into the formal economy with laws, codes and standards that could disrupt its activities and growth? On the other hand, what about the health hazards, as well as the rights and safety of the vulnerable groups that work in the sector, especially women, children and apprentices? (Rogerson 1996, 1997; ILO 1991).

These uncertainties about the informal sector are part of the age long debates about the rural and urban paths to development, and doubts about whether urbanisation in general is harmful or beneficial. Stereotypes about 'urban bias' suggest that if conditions in these cities continue to be improved, more and more people would be attracted to them to aggravate the problems of unemployment and squalor; that the worsening health and environmental problems of the cities are caused by the unregulated activities of the informal sector, which, if allowed to continue, could make the cities unlivable and unsustainable for present and future generations of towns people. Consequently, policies to improve urban conditions have often been sought indirectly through migration control and other policies to contain or reverse the trend of urbanisation. This approach has not only failed to stop the inevitable and irreversible process of urbanisation, but has pushed the cities to grow in a disorderly way, and for urban problems to accumulate. Current research suggests that the path to urban sustainability lies in trying to build and manage more inclusive and socially equitable cities. This would involve reviewing continuously the legislative and administrative environment in order to improve the security of land and housing tenure for the poor, to upgrade slums, and to strengthen urban local governance through broad-based partnerships that take the needs and participation of the poor and the informal sector fully into account (Fernandes et al. 1998; N-AERUS 2001).

### **The informal sector in Nigeria: from neglect to recognition**

Nigeria is the sixth-largest oil producing country in the world, and the largest and potentially the richest county in Africa. It has the largest concentration of black people in the world — with a land area of close to one million square kilometers, and a population of well over 125 million. Estimates at the turn of the century suggest that 43.5 per cent of the population live in urban areas, and is projected to reach 50 per cent by the year 2010, and 65 per cent by 2020. The rate of urban growth is thought to be 5.5 per cent, roughly twice the national population growth rate of 2.9 per cent. More than seven cities have population that exceed one million, and over 5000 towns and cities of various sizes have populations of between twenty and five hundred thousand. Greater Lagos, the former national capital, has grown from 1.4 million in 1963 to 3.5 million in 1975; is currently about six million, and projected to be 24 million by 2020. Information on the size and employment structure in the informal sector is hard

to obtain, but estimates suggest that the sector accounts for between 45 and 60 per cent of the urban labour force, up from about 25 per cent in the mid 1960s. Life expectancy at birth is about 52 years; infant mortality rate is as high as 19.1 per 1000; and the per capita income in Nigeria is thought to be USD 274 (Okunlola 2001; Nwaka 1992).

The development of the informal sector follows closely the general pattern of urban development in the country. Each phase in the development of the cities and the economy has its own dynamics in informal sector development. Many of the cities predate British colonial rule. These native towns, with large indigenous populations, subsequently had European Reservations and migrant quarters grafted onto them during colonial rule, but they have often retained their traditional characteristics — with traditional compound houses, customary attitudes and practices regarding food handling, waste disposal and personal hygiene, urban agriculture and livestock keeping. The areas of informality in such cities are very extensive.

British colonial rule neither anticipated nor approved of the growth of large African urban populations. Although many port cities, rivers ports, rail-side towns and administrative centres owed their growth to the activities generated by the European presence, colonial officials remained unreconciled to the idea of rapid urban growth, and tended to see the cities as an unfortunate by-product of colonial activities which had to be firmly contained in order to avoid political subversion and social disorganisation. The towns were not conceived or promoted as centres for industrial production for job creation and self-sustaining growth, but rather as small enclaves for administration, colonial trade and transportation. The policies and institutions for urban development, where they existed, were very restrictive and myopic, especially in the critical areas of land use control, planning and the provision of infrastructure and services. Planning and housing were used as an instrument of segregation and social policy — to ensure that the small community of Europeans was protected in segregated high quality residential reservations. Zoning and sanitation became an obsession (Stock 1988; Omuta 1986). Sadly, the laws, codes, regulations and institutions designed for the small populations envisaged in colonial cities, and for “sanitary segregation”, have been inherited with little rethinking by post-colonial administrations, and have naturally been quickly overtaken and overwhelmed by the process of rapid urban growth and post-colonial transformation. The expansion of the private sector and the pursuit of import-substitution industrialisation in the years after independence gave a boost to urban employment and urban growth in the formal and informal sectors. In post-colonial Nigeria and other African countries many analysts have observed a new process of urbanisation unleashed by the masses of relatively low income migrants, who have flocked into the cities since independence, and are seeking to solve their problems of accommodation and employment informally, and on their own terms ... the urban poor are now dominant, and in most cases are transforming the city to meet their needs, often in conflict with official laws and plans (Mabogunje 1992, 1995; Stren 1989).

Prior to the 1970s, the informal sector was not considered as a separate sector as such. Activities in the sector were classified variously as traditional crafts and petty trade in the subsistence sector, or as small scale industries within the formal sector, and treated as such. Some effort was made to upgrade what was considered the low level of productivity and low standard of workmanship through the establishment of small Industrial Development Centres, IDC, and later the Small-Scale Industry Credit Scheme, SSICS, to provide technical advice and training, and to offer small loans. No effort was however made to protect informal sector products from competition with imported mass produced goods, hence many informal sector operators tended to gravitate towards trading, services, transportation, etc. (Meagher 1999; Dike 1997).

With the expansion of the oil industry in the 1970s, after the disruptions of the civil war, the urban population expanded rapidly because of the increase in urban based opportunities in administration, construction, commerce and services, and the gradual relegation of rural agriculture. The optimism of the oil boom and the prevailing international policy posture as reflected in Habitat I (1976), encouraged government to undertake extensive programs of planning and public service delivery, including ambitious programs of public housing and the centralisation of land control under the Military. The administrative decentralisation, brought about by the creation of new states (12 in 1967, and now 36) from the four former regions, and the creation of several local governments (now 779), fostered the growth of many large and secondary towns that served as state capitals and local government headquarters. The urban informal sector expanded correspondingly to meet the increased demand of low income wage earners for moderately priced consumer goods and services. But the formal sector still monopolised much of the support that government provided, and little effort was made to foster formal-informal sector linkages.

Contrary to what the advocates of deregulation had presumed, the economic recession of the 1980s and the austerity measures that accompanied structural adjustment affected the informal sector adversely on both the demand and supply sides, as markets contracted and input costs rose. Cut-backs in public spending, drop in real wages, and public sector retrenchments swelled the ranks of the informal sector beyond its absorptive capacity. Many formal sector enterprises forged new links, sometimes exploitative links, with the informal sector to cope with the difficulties of the economic crisis (Meagher and Yunusa 1996). The borders between the 'formal' and the 'informal' sectors became blurred. Government response to this situation was contradictory in some respects, including both incentives to the sector by the establishment of training and credit facilities, and repression by the overzealous prosecution of the so called War Against Environmental Indiscipline and forced evictions on a large scale.

### **Patterns of official response**

The informal sector encompasses a wide range of areas of informality — environmental, spatial, economic and social, covering business activities, employment, markets, settlements and neighbourhoods. Each of these areas has implications for public policy. The informal sector has since the early days of national independence been the major provider of land and housing in the cities, as only about 20 to 40 per cent of the physical developments in the cities is carried out with formal government approval, and therefore provided with urban infrastructure and services. (Abumere 1982; Population Report 2002). Government officials often argue that the practical difficulties of upgrading irregular settlements and connecting them to urban infrastructure and services tend to reinforce their social and physical exclusion. On the other hand some argue that official restrictions on the availability of land and the bureaucratic procedures of government departments encourage the growth of more and more irregular settlements on the fringes of the cities and on empty public land.

Official policies for *housing* and *planning*, especially under the long period of military rule, have not been very effective and helpful. Only about 25 to 30 per cent of Nigerians, mainly top government functionaries, professionals and other rich and privileged people, benefit from government housing programs. The vast majority of the houses, especially those in informal settlements are crowded, structurally defective, and sometimes located in areas that do not provide adequate defenses against disease vectors and other health hazards. The legacies of colonial planning and housing have tended to reinforce physical and social segregation in the cities. The Nigerian Town and Country Planning Ordinance introduced by the colonial regime in 1946 remained virtually unchanged until 1992, not because it was working satisfactorily but because it was largely ignored and by-passed by rapid growth and spontaneous development. Most of the legislation and by-laws for environmental health and sanitation appear to be reminders of colonial segregation and oppression, and have very little current relevance or legitimacy. For instance, residential areas are now widely used for small businesses in complete disregard of the official zoning arrangements to separate areas of presumed incompatible activities. Although a revised Nigerian Urban and Regional Planning Law was introduced in 1992 to address some of the anomalies of the 1946 law, the administrative and technical institutions needed to implement the provisions of the new legislation are yet to be put in place (Egunjobi 2002). Also, the Nigerian Land Use Decree or Act, introduced in 1978 to streamline the wide variety of pre-existing land practices, to curb land speculation, and facilitate equitable access to land for bona fide public and private uses, has been marred by official arbitrariness and bureaucratic delays, and now constitutes a major blockage on land supply except for the rich and well connected individuals (Nwaka 1992; Amis and Lloyd 1990).

Nigeria has experimented with virtually all the approaches that were fashionable in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s — viz, slum clearance which caused much distress and social dislocation; sites and

services schemes which tried to open up new land and have it sub-divided into residential plots for distribution; slum or squatter upgrading which tried to fit new infrastructure and services into already disorderly and crowded settlements, etc. Also following Habitat I in 1976, and the oil boom of the 1970s and early 80s, Nigeria embarked on an elaborate program of public housing, but, typically, only about 12 per cent of the projected additional 300,000 housing units for 1970–74, and 25 per cent for 1975–80 was actually achieved. The enormous resources earmarked for the purpose were misappropriated or otherwise diverted to the construction of military barracks and other projects of doubtful priority. None of the housing programs advanced the housing conditions of the poor in irregular settlements but instead tended to provide subsidised housing for high and middle income groups and other well connected persons (Nwaka 1992).

The environmental conditions in most towns and informal settlements have progressively become appalling and life-threatening. Water supply and sanitation are grossly inadequate for domestic and personal hygiene, leading to a high incidence of diarrhea, cholera and other disease. Commercial and domestic wastes are not properly disposed of, with the result that large volumes of rubbish are left to litter the streets and to accumulate in open dumps where flies and other disease-carrying insects and rodents proliferate. The open drains are often clogged and exude unpleasant odour. Pot-holes in the streets, pools of stagnant water, and waste water gushing from bathrooms and kitchens provide breeding sites for malarial mosquitoes, flies and other disease vectors. Food contamination and poisoning, especially in the rapidly growing street foods and catering industry, pose a serious threat to public health; and air pollution, especially from exposure to toxic fumes from open cooking fires and stoves in poorly ventilated homes, is responsible for a wide variety of respiratory infections among women and children (IIED/DANIDA 2001; Hardoy and Satterthwaite 1989; McGranahan et al. 1999).

Government authorities and planners have tended to blame these problems on the informal sector, and have sought to deal with the challenge of informality through increased powers of control and regulation, by insisting on legal titles to land, public housing, mortgage finance, etc.; but these conventional approaches have usually bypassed the poor, still leaving the informal sector as the dominant provider of land and housing in large parts of the urban and peri-urban areas.

Informal sector policies in the 1980s were very repressive, while the response to the sector in the 1990s was much more pragmatic and promotional. The military administration of General Buhari which overthrew the Second Republic was so dissatisfied with the state of the environment that it discontinued with the idea of central planning altogether. Instead it initiated an aggressive campaign for environmental awareness and sanitation as the focus of the fifth phase of the so-called 'War Against Environmental Indiscipline' (WAI). A large number of environmental task forces were set up by State Edicts to organise public enlightenment campaigns, and to enforce environmental discipline

through mobile sanitation courts. Special days of the month were set aside for general clean up by everybody — to unblock drains, clean residential and work places, and remove heaps of rubbish. The cleanest cities were promised one million naira prize, and a definite improvement in the environment appeared to have been achieved, at least temporarily. Unfortunately, the potential merit of the program was marred by overzealous officials and the military drive for quick results. The campaign soon became associated with the misguided drive to contain urban growth, and to restrain the informal sector, as the sector was blamed for all sorts of evil social influence — littering the streets, obstructing traffic, creating various forms of pollution and nuisance, crime, piracy, prostitution, foreign exchange malpractices, etc. Informal sector enterprises such as hawking and other forms of street business were incessantly harassed and compelled to relocate in remote and inaccessible outskirts of the towns. Kiosks, illegal structures and shanty towns in Lagos, Kano, Port Harcourt and other state capitals were raided and ruthlessly demolished (Braithwaite 1989; Nwaka 1996).

The military approach was certainly not a permanent solution to the problem, as it caused so much discontent and distress, and provoked many human rights activists. The government of General Babangida, which overthrew Buhari, showed little enthusiasm for environmental sanitation, and has credit for initiating a number of rural and urban social programs to address the poverty and austerity that came in the wake of Structural Adjustment, which was introduced notably the well funded Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure, DFFRI, and the Directorates for Employment, NDE, for Mass Mobilisation, MAMSER, and so on. For the urban informal sector the most relevant initiatives were the establishment of the People's Bank, the Community Banks and the National Directorate for Employment. Access to credit is important to small business aspiring to grow and become more profitable. Between 1990 and 1992 the government established as many as 401 Community and Peoples Banks, modeled on the Asian experience, and on the principles of traditional rotational credit system. These banks were to provide small loans and other forms of financial and business services for the poor and informal sector enterprises, with the whole community acting as guarantor for loan repayment. Within two years these banks together had built up assets of over 981 million naira, mobilised over 640 million in savings and deposits, and disbursed 150 million naira as loans and advances (Mabogunje 1995). Unfortunately, recent studies suggest that only about ten per cent of informal sector workers interviewed were aware of how to take advantage of the facilities offered by the Banks, and the Employment Directorate. Civil servants, military officers' wives, and other well connected persons appear to have hijacked the scheme, often getting loans far in excess of the approved official maximum (Dike 1997; Halfani 1996).

The National Directorate for Employment, established earlier in 1987/88, was meant to promote self-employment through training and credit for unemployed youths, but the main orientation of the program was to reverse rural-urban migration by encouraging investment in rural agriculture. The

informal sector was thought to be already saturated, although the government also launched the National Open Apprenticeship Scheme, as part of the NDE, to support the placement of apprentices in informal sector workshops, and supplement their practical training with other forms of formal training for skills they would need in future for their enterprises. Again, only a small percentage of unemployed youths and apprentices benefited from the scheme, which was undermined by under-funding and other forms of malpractice (Dike 1997). The main argument of the paper is that the original idea behind these progressive initiatives should be re-animated, and their implementation enforced and improved upon.

### **Emerging new trends and policy directions**

Since the World Bank and the United Nations system of organisations are the largest and most influential agencies for development assistance, the policies and development agendas they advocate tend to provide the international policy context for national and even local policies and programs for developing countries. The main elements of good governance which these agencies prescribe as essential for sustainable urbanisation and the improvement of human settlements include the principles of *enablement*, *decentralisation* and *partnership*. The enabling strategy implies that the traditional welfare state approach, in which government sought to be the primary provider, should give way to a new role for government as enabler and facilitator that creates the right environment and incentives for the formal and informal private sector and civil society organisations to contribute to the development process. But government is also to intervene where necessary to enable markets to operate effectively, to ensure social equity, and to protect the poor and disadvantaged groups. There is also a new emphasis on a more collaborative approach to development that would integrate and mutually support the development objectives of the various stakeholders. For instance, the Habitat Agenda urges that:

“Partnerships among countries and among all actors within countries from public, private, voluntary and community-based organisations, the cooperative sector, non-governmental organisations and individuals are essential to the achievement of sustainable human settlements development and the provision of adequate shelter for all and basic services” (UN-Habitat 1998).

There is also growing international consensus that the crisis of governance in developing countries is at the heart of the worsening urban environmental health conditions. Decentralisation is considered essential because government is more effective when power is shared, and when the level of government nearest to the people is given sufficient authority and resources to respond effectively to local needs. Nigeria has since the 1980s tried to restructure the country's political system, and to decentralise the structure of administration by creating 36 states from the four former regions, and as many as 774 new local governments. But decision-making and resources allocation have remained

highly centralised. Local government and municipalities still remain under the legal and political influence of the higher levels of government whose leaders appear to have different political interests and priorities. There remains an urgent need for genuine decentralisation to open up more political space at the local level and encourage more broad-based participation, accountability, inclusiveness and social sustainability.

These cardinal principles of good governance, as well as the general concern for poverty reduction are reflected in the different global initiatives of the last decade which seek to implement the programs of action of the major UN Conferences and development goals. In addition to the Sustainable Cities Programme, the UN-Habitat and its partner organisations have launched the Global Campaigns for Urban Governance, and for Secure Tenure that seek to promote more inclusive cities, and to guide national governments and local authorities on the need for improved governance practices, for secure land and housing tenure and how to combat the incidence of forced evictions. The Cities Alliance for Cities Without Slums, sponsored by the World Bank, seeks, like the Millennium Development Goals, to achieve a significant improvement in the lives of millions of slum dwellers within the next decade. As well, the WHO's Healthy Cities Programme seeks to highlight the health and environmental dimensions of urban development, and to promote a more integrated approach to urban management and human settlement development. These various initiatives and programs provide helpful guidelines which should be adopted in the quest for sustainable urbanisation, and the improvement of conditions for the urban poor.

### **The way forward**

The way forward lies in adapting the lessons of international research and experience to local conditions, and in the collaborative efforts of state and local authorities, the international development community and the informal sector workers themselves. The overall goal should be to build a better functioning, more inclusive, healthier and socially sustainable city.

In the new urban partnership proposed above, *local governments* are on the front line, and should be given greater authority, discretion and enhanced capacity to mobilise local support and resources, and take everybody's needs and views into account in formulating and implementing development policies and programs. The concept of Local Agenda 21, promoted by the Earth Summit in Rio and the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), is based on the premise that local governments are better placed than distant central or regional authorities to broker and harmonise the new partnerships among various stakeholders.

To play their role effectively local governments need improved technical, administrative and financial capacity through genuine decentralisation and increased support from national and international

development agencies, including non-governmental organisations. As well, it is essential to increase the level of local participation by allowing the poor more scope for their own initiatives, and greater influence on public policies and service provision. The various associations and organisations of local governments and local government employees in Nigeria, such as ALGON and NULGA, should act more forcefully as intermediaries in policy dialogue, and through networking promote the exchange of ideas, experiences and resources. Above all, the ongoing consultations in the country to review the 1976 Local Government Guidelines in order to strengthen the position of local governments should be sustained, and hopefully guided by the recommendations of the Political Bureau of 1987 on the matter.

At the *national level*, government must address squarely the unresolved constitutional question of intergovernmental relations in the Nigerian federal system, to ensure greater decentralisation of roles, and a more equitable allocation of resources among the three tiers of government — federal, state and local. As part of creating the supportive and enabling environment referred to above, government at the federal and state levels should continuously review and update existing legislation in respect of urban planning, building standards, infrastructure and environmental regulations etc. in order to make them more realistic, attainable and compatible with local conditions. While government and planners should retain long term control to guarantee public safety and environmental health, local conditions dictate that planning should become more flexible, more advisory and promotional, and seek to mediate conflicting interests and values, rather than adhere to the traditional preoccupation with zoning, regulation and control to preserve the sanctity of public and private property, and to stop slums from forming. Some adjustments and compromises have to be made to ensure enhanced security of land and housing tenure for the poor in order to give them a sufficient stake in and incentive to improve the quality of where they live and work. Informal sector settlements and activities must be decriminalised to ensure social harmony and sustainability (ILO 1991; Tripp 2003).

Indeed, current research suggests that slums and irregular settlements grow not only because the people who live in them are poor, but because of overregulation, the sluggishness of government to provide adequate and affordable land, and failure to harness the energies and resources of the poor in the right direction. The creation of a dual and parallel urban systems — the 'formal' and 'informal', the 'legal' and 'illegal' should give way an appropriate mix and range of tenure systems and standards within the same city, providing scope for incremental improvement over time as resources improve. "What is required is not scaling down building standards that everyone should build up to, but minimum standards that everyone could start with" (McAuslan in N-AERUS 3002; Fernands et al. 1998). While the discredited colonial Town and Country Planning Act of 1946 has been replaced by the 1992 Urban and Regional Planning Law, none of the National Planning Commission, State Planning Boards, and Local Government Planning Authorities envisaged in the implementation of the

provisions of the new law have yet become operational (Egunjabi 2002). There is also a long standing need to review the centralised approach to land use control introduced by the 1978 Land Use Decree, and to move towards a more decentralised land delivery system, that would be more flexible, and would also incorporate traditional concepts and practices that are still widely adopted in most urban and peri-urban areas. This is in line with the current advocacy for endogenising formal institutions to reconcile them to local conditions, and give them greater social legitimacy. Recent research by a World Bank team has stressed the need to restore “the structural and functional disconnect between informal indigenous institutions rooted in the regions history and culture, and formal institutions mostly transplanted from outside” (Dia 1996). Indeed many critics complain that Nigerian and African cities still look like houses built from the roof down:

“all the institutions of modern urbanisation are in place — the banks, the factories, the legal system, the unions, etc.; but all these appear to be suspended over societies that have no firm connections to them, and whose indigenous institutions, even when oriented in the right direction, lack the necessary scaffolding to connect to their modern surrogates” (Mabogunje 1995).

Furthermore, while some of the anti-urban, back-to-land policies to contain and reverse rapid urbanisation have proved to be unhelpful, it may be necessary to explore more actively national policies to slow down the rate of population growth in the cities and elsewhere through programs for reproductive health and family planning, which, together with purposeful urbanisation policies, could help to lower fertility, and thus ease pressure on the cities and overburdened urban services (Population Reports 2002).

*International development assistance* also needs to be reviewed and better co-ordinated to give greater priority to poverty reduction and improved social services. New safety nets need to be evolved because of the dramatic increase in urban poverty following the economic crisis and structural adjustments of the 1980s and 1990s. The Habitat Agenda urges multi-lateral and bilateral development agencies, the UN agencies, regional development organisations and NGOs to provide new and additional financial assistance and technical support for capacity and institution building in order to achieve the goal of ‘Adequate Shelter for All’. There is an even greater urgency to address the structural causes and roots of poverty in the developing world through “positive action on the issues of finance, external debt, international trade and transfer of technology” (UN-Habitat 1998; Satterthwaite 2000). The major development agencies should be given more support to disseminate information on best practices that could guide governance and human development policies in the developing world. The different global development initiatives sponsored by the World Bank, the UNDP, UN-Habitat, WHO, ICLEI, as well as the NGOs, need to be better coordinated to complement each other, and to be able to identify gaps in the international development effort. Also, the new advocacy for decentralised

cooperation among donors has the potential to promote North-South city-to-city relations for mutual benefit, and to channel resources and expertise directly to local governments and municipalities, and to other deserving local partners.

Finally, the *informal sector* operators should not be content merely with self-help and being left alone to fend for themselves. With their diverse and widely dispersed enterprises and settlements, and their general orientation towards their rural hometowns, they are usually more difficult to organise, and to be assisted to develop much needed civic engagement. They need better organisation and self-regulation to be able to engage more constructively with government and other development partners, and to increase their power to lobby, negotiate and influence public policy in favour of their sector (World Bank 2004). They could pool resources through 'clustering' and other forms of cooperation that promote mutual support to help their businesses to grow and mature (Rogerson 1997). Collectively they must curb some of the socially unacceptable 'coping strategies' that tend to discredit them, such as adulteration, crime, and other sharp practices, and confine themselves to genuine activities for livelihood that are only technically 'illegal' in the sense of not conforming with official regulations and bureaucratic norms many of which are arbitrary and inequitable. After all:

“a modern economy can be made up of sectors and activities with very different sizes, types of technology, styles of organisation and degrees of integration into local, national, regional and international markets... The fundamental *raison d'être* of any economic system is the wellbeing of the individuals, their families and communities. Economic power, the growth of national income, the increase of profit, the enlargement of a firm are only instruments. Deified, they become obstacles to the welfare of the population. To modernise the economy is to use the best techniques available to allow the individual to work, to create, to earn an income, and to enforce the rights of employees and workers” (Danida 1997, p. 18).

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