



URBAN DECAY AND RENEWAL IMPACT ON THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF RESIDENTS IN BENIN CITY, NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

Cities play pivotal role in the socio-economic and physical development of countries world-over. Unfortunately, many cities especially in developing countries fall short of their expectation as they assume chaotic physical expression of growth. This situation is variously interpreted as Decay, Decline, Rot and Sprawl. Urban decay is the state of urban squalidness characterized by decrepit structures, poor amenities condition, overcrowding, under provision of amenities and general deterioration of the urban environment. Scholars of the built environment noted that obsolescence and poor planning combine with other factors brought about this urban menace in many cities. Urban renewal involves the redevelopment, rehabilitation, revitalization and regeneration of a degraded urban area. This research looks at the effort by Edo State government in tackling the problem of urban decay in Benin City, Nigeria, with focus on the cause(s), effect, the strategy adopted for restoration and its' impact on the quality of life of residents. The study was approached by way of field investigations. Data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. Findings revealed that the lack of attention by concerned government agencies and poverty caused the urban deterioration problem in Benin City. The study also shows that urban decline situation in Benin City is largely connected to economic downturn, lack of basic infrastructure and, poor planning coupled with nonchalance attitude towards public facilities by residents, and lack of environment cleaning culture on the part of stakeholders. However, the research revealed that the effort by government to transforming Benin City which is one of Nigeria's foremost cities was generally impactful. Nevertheless, the study suggested that integrated planning and development is sacrosanct to achieving sustainable urban renewal programme in Nigeria.

Keywords: Decay, Poverty and Poor Planning, Sustainable Renewal.

INTRODUCTION

Cities play very significant developmental roles in all countries the world over. However, one of the challenges that hinder their efficient functioning is the phenomenon of urban decay or urban decline. According to Owoeye and Omole (2012), urban decay is the process whereby a previously functioning city or part of a city falls into disrepair and decrepitude. Often, urban decay manifest dilapidation of public infrastructures, de-industrialization, abandoned buildings, high local unemployment, fragmented families, changing population, political disenfranchisement, crime and a desolate, inhospitable city landscape.



In some cases, such desolate and inhospitable city landscapes are seen to be of 'urban blight'. Danson (2008) opined that blight situations do result from the deterioration and decay of buildings in older areas of large cities, due to neglect, crime or lack of economic support. Abumere (1987), Jinadu (2008), and Eni & Abua (2014) concluded that the implications of urban decay can be viewed from its physical, economic and social dimensions. The physical dimension exhibits urban squalidness and overcrowdings characterized by decrepit structures, poor amenities conditions, and general deterioration of the urban environment. In economic terms urban decay refers to a decline in the productivity of an area of the city, leading to economic dis-investment, downturn, unemployment problem and poverty. The social dimension of urban decay refers to the social-cultural deterioration often associated with physical and economic decline of parts or the entire city such as hooliganism, moral bankruptcy, crime, political unrest, social segregation, internal displacement, kidnapping and assassination.

The deterioration as well as expansion challenges faced by world cities prompted the idea of urban renewal as a comprehensive restoration approach to the menace associated with the growth of cities worldwide. According to Gibson and Langstaff (1984), Couch (1990) and Levy (2009) urban renewal which is also called regeneration or revitalization depending on the country and its transformational focus, involves such strategic options like clearance, redevelopment, rehabilitation/up-grade, conservation, community development and integrated planning. 'Urban renewal is also used to rehabilitate or redevelop a country that is affected by war or natural disaster' (Omole, 2000, p.22). Countries like Hong Kong, United States of America, England and South Africa hold success of urban renewal programmes. For instance, in United States of America, the White Plains in New York was transformed to a big commercial centre as an urban renewal project. Many urban renewal projects have been embarked upon in the past and recent times in Nigeria. Some of these renewal projects include that of Isale-Eko, Jos, Uyo, Bodija, Ibadan, Calabar, Enugu, and so on. One of the recent and adjudged successful urban renewal projects in Nigeria is that of Calabar in Cross-River state, which hitherto suffered 'exponential deterioration and dilapidation especially in the older part like Duke town' (Eni and Abua, 2014, p. 2). In some other parts of Nigeria, the urban renewal projects were however not successful. Example of failed urban renewal programme in Nigeria includes that of Maroko in Lagos state in the early 1980s and the sustainable Ibadan Project (SIP) in 1997 that was sponsored by UNICEF and UNDP in partnership with Oyo State Government (Basorun, 2004), (Omole, 2000) and (Okojie, 2010).

Following the foot-step of other States in Nigeria, Edo State government initiated the first ever urban renewal of Benin City, the state capital in 2008 with a view to tackling the urban decay problem in the ancient city. The intervention covered road rehabilitation and construction, enforcement of physical development control measures, refuse management, improvement of health and educational infrastructures, traffic management, flooding and erosion control, and general beautification of the city. This research focused on examining the problem of urban decay, causes, and benefits of renewal in Benin City.

Problem Statement

Urban decay is experienced in both the cities of the developed and the developing countries, but the approach and successes of the renewal attempt to addressing the deterioration challenges in these countries are far apart in the literature between the formal and the latter.



Evidently, many completed renewal projects especially in developing are roundly criticized against the intention and out-come because they were either not handled the right way or were ill-conceived and have therefore ‘induced different social and environmental problems instead’ (Omole, 2000, p.27).

Beyond physical transformation, economic revitalization is one of the contemporary approaches in urban renewal which plays prominent role in the sustenance of urban renewal programs. This concept is of the view that with industrialization and employment opportunities given to all and sundry, people will eat well, think well, reason well and then consider to inhabit a decent environment (Robert and Sykes, 2006, p. 36) Social renewal is another important aspect of urban transformation which has to do with harmonious evolution of civil society, fostering an environment conducive to the compatible cohabitation of culturally and socially diverse groups while at the same time encouraging social integration, with improvement in the quality of life for all segment of the population. According to Assefa and Frostell (2007) and Colantonio and Dixon (2009) a socially sustainable renewal is the finality of an effective urban renewal while economic and environmental sustainability are both the goals and instrument for its attainment.

In the light of the above, Couch (1990) suggested that it is imperative that urban renewal initiative be well articulated by checking and eliminating chances of counter-productivity. In Nigeria, the worlds ‘most populous black nation, a number of urban renewal programmes were reported to have failed due to several factors including lack of planning and design, community participation, abandonment, poverty, Poor programme initiation and execution, corrupt practices amongst others. For instance, street cleaning and provision of housing units for the unemployed and the under-employed could not solve the urban derelict situated in central Lagos but created new ones.

Fortunately, Benin City is one of the few urban centres’ in Nigeria where government decided to face urban deterioration problems head long by embarking on massive rehabilitation and redevelopment of the public infrastructures, economic regeneration and city beautification which it tagged “Benin City Urban Renewal”. Specifically, the renewal projects covered rehabilitation of existing roads and construction of new ones, portable water supply, waste management, improvement of public mass transit services, eradication of street trading activities, improvement of it health care facilities and the refurbishment of it educational infrastructures. Others includes flooding and erosion control, renovation of some markets, industrialization through public private partnership(PPP) arrangement, provision of housing in partnership with the organized private sector and general improvement on the aesthetics of the city.

Despite this laudable initiative, a look around the urban environment in Benin City does not justify the acclaimed effort by government to revamp the city as there seem to be consistent urban decay typical of many other towns and cities in Nigeria. This paper is therefore focused on attaining sustainable urban renewal in Benin City, Edo State with an evaluative study of it first ever urban renewal intervention programs between 2008 to 2016, hence the research gap.



Aim and Objectives

This study is aim at attaining improved quality of life through sustainable urban renewal programme initiative in Benin City.

The objectives of the study include;

- a. to identify the problem and causes of urban decay in Benin City.
- b. to examine the effect of the urban decay situation in Benin City.
- c. to determine the adopted urban renewal approach or strategy in Benin City.
- d. to evaluate the perceived impact of the urban renewal projects on the quality of life of residence in Benin City.

Tested Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant difference in the quality of life of residents in Benin City before and after the urban renewal programme.

H₁: There is significant difference in the quality of life of residents in Benin City before and after the urban renewal programme.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilized data from both primary and secondary sources. Data from primary source was obtained directly from the field. This was collected through the administration of structured questionnaire, scheduled oral interview, field measurements and personal observation. Secondary data for this study was obtained from both published and unpublished literatures. These include textbooks, journals, conference papers, thesis and the internet. Data on the causes of urban blight in Benin City, was sourced through field observation by the researcher, administration of questionnaire to residents in the study area and interview of relevant government agencies such as the Ministry of Physical Planning and Urban Development, Ministry of Environment and Public utilities, Edo State Water Board, Ministry of Transport, Edo State Waste Management Board, Ministry of Commerce and Strategic Planning, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Youth and Social Development and the Ministry of Infrastructures.

Method of Data Collection

Giving that the population of Benin City is above 1 million according to National Population Commission (NPC, 2015), a sample population of 384 respondents was determined for the study using Fisher's formula for cross sectional descriptive study; where minimum size is calculated using the formula:

$$N = \frac{z^2 pq}{d^2}$$

Where;

N = The desired sample size

Z = The standard Normal Deviate usually set at 1.96 Corresponding to 95% Confidence Level

P = The Proportion in the Target Population

q = 1- p

d = Degree of Accuracy Desired Set at 0.05



Table 1: Calculated minimum sample size for cross sectional descriptive study

Population	100	500	1,000	10,000	100,000	1,000,000+
10%	50	81	88	96	96	97
5%	80	218	278	370	383	384
1%	99	476	906	4,900	8,763	9,513

Source: Bartlett et al (2001) and Ogeibu (2014).

Method of Data Analysis

- Sourced data was analysed by use of descriptive statistics and other statistical procedures. For the descriptive analysis, detailed explanations by the engagement of such tools like tables, was employed. Also, the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the returned questionnaires.
- The hypothesis test examined if the difference in quality of urban environment in Benin City before and after the urban renewal programme is significant.
- In view of the nature of study and required investigation for two independent variables of a sample population which is equal to and above thirty, the Z-test distribution was considered appropriate. This is because it enable us to judge the significance of difference between the average occurrence of some condition in two different areas or the occurrence of different conditions in the same area (Rilwani, 2005. P.149).
- To achieve this, the research compared the performance of selected quality of life enhancing project/programmes of the Benin City urban sectors like educational development, health care delivery, waste management, erosion control, portable water supply, industrialization, housing provision, urban mass transit provision, traffic management, economic development, control of street trading/hawking activities, construction/maintenance of road network, street cleaning and beautification before and after renewal by computing the mean average.

According to Anyadike (2009), the formular for Z-test distribution is

$$z = \frac{\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2}{\sqrt{(\sigma_1^2 N_1 + \sigma_2^2 N_2)}}$$

Where:

\bar{x}_1 and \bar{x}_2 = the respective means

σ_1^2 and σ_2^2 = population variance

N = the population size

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The statistical analysis was tested at 5% of significance or 95% confidence level which is the p-value (0.05) for the various components of urban transformation of the study area as computed while the Z-table value at 95% is 1.96. The statistical analysis of the calculated Z-test is thus presented in table 2.



Table 2: Urban renewal performance by sector

Sources of variation	Group Before After	Mean	Mean Difference	z-score	P-Value
URBAN PHYSICAL ENV.	1	3.2753	0.8623	17.281	17.24
	2	2.4130	0.8623	17.281	
HOUSING	1	3.5065	-0.47792	-7.131	7.13
	2	3.9844	-0.47792	-7.131	
WATER SUPPLY	1	3.9974	0.5974	0.715	0.72
	2	3.9377	0.5974	0.715	
ROAD QUALITY	1	4.1325	1.53766	22.298	22.29
	2	2.5948	1.53766	22.298	
WASTE MGT.	1	.3169	-.50909	-7.135	7.17
	2	3.8260	-7.135	-7.135	
MASS TRANSIT PROVISION	1	3.7299	7.213	7.213	7.57
	2	3.2026	7.213	7.213	
ECONOMIC GROWTH	1	3.7299	1.203	1.203	1.21
	2	3.6442	1.203	1.203	
TRAFFICE MANAGEMENT	1	3.8260	9.323	9.323	9.27
	2	3.1403	9.323	9.323	
STREET TRADING ACTIVITIES	1	1.3584	-1.54026	20.512	20.53
	2	3.8987	-1.54026	-20.512	
EDUCATION QUALITY	1	3.8104	.97403	15.800	15.72
	2	2.8364	.97403	15.800	
HEALTH SERVICE PROVISION	1	3.8208	-1.22597	-20.031	12.69
	2	3.0468	1.22597	-20.031	
EROSION CONTROL	1	3.0571	-0.1481	-1.4805	2.18
	2	3.2052	0.1481	-1.4805	



From the analysis, the test statistics shows, that we did not reject the null hypothesis for portable water supply and economic growth at critical value of Z at 0.05 meaning that H_0 : is accepted, so there is no significant difference in portable water supply and economic development sectors of the urban renewal initiative during the period under review (2008-2016).

The calculated Z of other variables was found to be greater than 1.96 hence H_0 : was rejected. The result shows that there is a significant difference in urban physical environment, housing, road construction and traffic management, urban mass transit services, waste management, control street trading and erection of make-shift structures for business purposes. Others are the health sector, educational infrastructures, flooding and erosion control. From the analysis therefore, it is pretty clear that it was only on portable water supply and economic advancement that was not positively affected by the renewal programmes while others investigated were affected positively during the period.

Summary of Findings

1. The investigation revealed that poor physical planning and weak urban governance by successive government mainly contributed to the urban deterioration (decay) in Benin City. As observed, the non-adherence to the city master plan and weak enforcement of development control resulted in the squalid state of the study area.
2. Poverty as a result of economic down tune which can attributed to weak industrial base and employment opportunity were also noted to be responsible for the growth of slums, hawking by the under age, street begging and touting activities. These categories of residents are not able to afford decent housing in the study area.
3. Investigation also revealed that obsolescence of infrastructure contributed in no small measure to the decay situation. Field observation revealed that most of the basic infrastructures/utilities were built during the colonial era and early military regime in Nigeria.
4. The insensitivity of government in the past towards the restoration of the study area resulted in poor health, service delivery, lack of quality education, indiscriminate dumping of refuse at market and other public places such as road intersections and moat, slow rate of economic growth, lack of portable water supply, flooding and erosion problem and poor urban transportation system.
5. Although the urban renewal of Benin City was well publicized, the benefiting communities were not given the opportunity to contributions at the planning, design and implementation stages of the renewal exercise hence it was not participatory.
6. Investigation revealed that the exercise carried out is not urban renewal per say but public infrastructure up-grade especially in the areas of road construction and storm water project which constitute about 70% of the total project carried out in the study area.
7. Despite effort to check the activities, the study area still parades destitute, street begging and touts. Also worrisome is the indiscriminate parking, loading and discharge of passenger by commercial mass transit operators and the persistent trading activities on the walkway in Benin City.
8. The approach towards the renewal was not strategic and comprehensive as of urban renewal practice in the developed world. Most residents whose properties were affected



were not compensated and no resettlement scheme was put in place to house the displaced.

However, the urban renewal exercise was adjudged to have impacted the life of residents in Benin City. This, position is predicated on the decades of neglect by successive government; hence the exercise was a welcome development.

CONCLUSION

Neglect by government and its agencies that are responsible for urban planning and development, coupled with poverty caused the urban decay problem in Benin City. An appreciable effort was made in view of Benin City transformation especially in the area of road rehabilitation, renovation of public schools, reconstruction of the central hospital and erosion control amongst others.

However, economic regeneration, portable water supply and electricity supply are yet a big challenge in the study area. As observed, economic activities in the study area is at a low level obviously because of industrialization problem and the closure of most manufacturing and service industries and the relocation of others in the recent past to other state is taking a negative tune on the physical and social transformation of the urban centre.

Although the infrastructural development effort and the enabling environment created by government for private and public investment in the state is directed at economic transformation, concerted effort by government to industrialize the study area is not yet at appreciable level considering the years of neglect and the ever increasing rate of urbanization, in view of urban redevelopment sustenance. Urban development proposal or master plan is a public document that spell out the development agenda of government as gazetted, such that the contributions of various stakeholders toward the development proposal is not negotiable in ensuring effectiveness. However, this was not the case in the transformation plans for Benin City by government.

The renewal programme did not effectively tackle the problem of destitute, street beggars, touts, pickpocketing and commercial sex workers activities around the central business district (CBD) due to weak enforcement and poor monitoring on the part of government. The issue of compensation and resettlement was not handled properly. While some properties were compulsorily acquired and compensated for, others were left to suffer the consequence of demolition without any form of assistance.

The proposed plan by government to develop New Towns in the three senatorial district in the state is a laudable vision that should be pursued vigorously as it will help to reduce pressure and sustain the level of sanity that have been achieved thus far in Benin City.

Recommendations

To achieve a sustainable urban renewal that will make meaningful impact in the life of residents in Benin City, the following are hereby recommended.

- i. Determination of a vision for strategic long term plan that will focus on improving the image of Benin City by extending public services and infrastructure to the entire city coverage area. This will help to maintain a safe living environment.



- ii. Multi-disciplinary professionals should be set up as a team to monitor the city growth and prepare proposal for urban regeneration design that will improve the condition of the built environment from time to time.
- iii. Cultural and historical heritage should be promoted through conservation, rehabilitation and maintenance of building, monuments, open spaces, landscapes and settlement patterns of historical, architectural, religious and spiritual value.
- iv. Sufficient employment opportunities should be generated as well as improvement of the function of the city centre.
- v. Enhance and sustain access to credit services and land to assist housing provision both for private developer and mortgage institutions to encourage public housing provision..
- vi. Rural poverty should be reduced or possibly eradicated by extension of infrastructure, public services and employment to check rural-urban migration.
- vii. Marginal groups like destitute and street beggars should be given priority when providing basic services. For instance, the Internally Displaced Persons Camp (IDP) at Uhogua village near Benin City, need to be upgraded in all its ramifications to ensure healthy leaving of the IDPs and reduce the number of beggars roaming the streets of Benin City.
- viii. The physical planning and development control unit of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development should be adequately empowered and equipped to carry out their responsibility to monitor and ensure sanity of Benin City. This should be inclusive of other relevant government organ that is connected therewith to the development and sustenance of the built environment.

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