

# Popular Shaping of Metropolitan Forms and Processes in Nigeria: Glimpses and Interpretations from an Informed Lagosian

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This paper has been motivated by the proposition that understanding the processes that have shaped and are shaping the spatial and demographic transformation of Lagos (and its adverse concomitants) requires attention to two sets of conditions. First are the specific historical, geographical, and political factors that have driven the rapid emergence of Lagos as one of Africa's largest cities. Second is the role of the mass of people that have interacted with and responded to these sweeping conditions in modifying and mediating their consequences for the livability, productivity, serviceability, and manageability of Lagos. Such a rounded approach to the study of Lagos is especially called for if the derived conclusions are to serve as a basis for conceptualizing and planning effective responses to the key social, economic, environmental, and political problems that have earned Lagos so much notoriety since the early 1980s.

Yet, a quick reading of the fairly large and growing academic literature on Lagos reveals an almost exclusive preoccupation with the urban pathologies that are prevalent within the metropolis. There is virtually no difference between the titles of newspaper articles and video film productions about Lagos and those of research papers in academic texts and journals. Social science research on Lagos has been reduced to mechanistic accounts of spatial disorder, de-beautification, organized violence and crime, inter-ethnic strife, civil disorder, overcrowding, flooding, air and noise pollution, unemployment, widespread poverty, traffic chaos, and risk-bearing sexual practices among other problems.<sup>1</sup> While these constitute an important part of the Lagos reality, the puzzle that needs to be resolved via research and analysis is larger than and transcends these problems. This is because with cognizance of the ecology of Lagos and the clearly unmanageable rapidity with which it has grown in the last four decades, it should also be of research interest to find out why the metropolis has not completely descended into a permanent state of chaos, illegal squatting, interpersonal-cuminter-group strife, and blight. The now long-standing prediction that Lagos is about to implode as a result of its explosive growth seems to be blocking creative and critical assessment of where Lagos is, has been, and is heading.

This paper therefore interrogates the development and problems of Lagos through the lens of a deeply "doubly involved" social demographer. The claim to being a Lagosian derives from the fact of having resided in Lagos for most of the time since 1976, living in Isolo within the middle belt of the metropolis for four years, Ojota/Ogudu to the northeast for thirteen years, Shangisha/Magodo also to the northeast for four years, Yaba/Alagomeji to the east for two years, and finally Lekki/Ajah to the extreme southeast since January 1, 2000. This experiential knowledge of the city, together with my involvement in a series of sustained social scientific investigations of its growth and environmental problems undertaken during the mid-1990s and my continuing interest in investigating Lagos as a socio-demographic phenomenon, informs the rather arrogant claim to being an informed Lagosian. But social science is always hugely enriched by history, even recent history, especially if the quest is to understand patterns in the collective and entrepreneurial activities of a mass of people spread across space and time, as is the case in Lagos, with its poor, suffering but undaunted majority.

The rest of the paper draws on an inter-mixture of autobiography and conventional urban research evidence to: (1) provide a balanced reading of the metropolitanization of Lagos by giving greater visibility to the role of the poor majority in shaping the boundaries and population distribution of the city; (2) briefly discuss the scale and severity of some of the key problems of Lagos in relation to its exceptional rate of urbanization and the grossly inadequate expansion of formal employment opportunities, infrastructure, and services; and (3) examine the contributions of “everyday” Lagos residents to the prevention of environmental collapse and to the governability of Lagos. Done this way, the paper is able to conclude that properly harnessed, the productive, civic engagement, and sustainable livelihood activities of the urban majority can provide the basis for the transformation of Lagos into a more liveable and environmentally stable metropolis.

## **I. The Metropolitanization of Lagos: The Conventional and the Complete Story**

### **The Standard Account of the Development of the Lagos Metropolitan Area**

There is general agreement among scholars and informed observers that the demographic growth and spatial expansion of Lagos has by all standards been spectacular.<sup>2</sup> In 1910, Lagos was limited to an area less than five square kilometers and inhabited by fewer than 50,000 persons. By the year 2000, it had grown both spatially and in population size by more than a factor of 100. Today, metropolitan Lagos, which encompasses less than 2.5 percent of Nigeria’s land area of 923,768 square kilometers, accommodates at least 8 percent of Nigeria’s total population of around 115 million. Relatedly, the population density of Lagos city 40 years ago is about 45 percent less than that of the urban sprawl of contemporary Lagos, which averages 8-10,000 persons per square kilometer, but reaches over 20,000 persons per square kilometer in several neighborhoods. This transformation is generally explained by the fact that the population has grown at a much faster rate than the land area, with in-migration estimated as contributing about 65 percent.

The resultant process of metropolitanization has been marked (especially since the early 1970s) by two trends: (a) increasing population density within existing built-up areas, and (b) population expansion into new land areas via the progressive incorporation of neighboring towns and outlying rural settlements — many of the latter had a long history of independent existence before becoming part of metropolitan Lagos. One obvious consequence has been the precipitously declining share of the Island areas in the population distribution (see panel 3 of Table 1). At least 90 percent of the population of contemporary Lagos resides outside these areas, which viewed together may be referred to as Old Lagos or The Municipality.

A close examination of Figure 1 showing the map of Greater Lagos around 1975 and around the year 2000 (with the latter being on a scale that is about half of the former) brings out vividly the exceptional rapidity of its metropolitanization. In twenty-five years, Lagos has so expanded horizontally, especially westward and northeastward, that it has at least tripled in areal extent and in density of active, fully built-up neighborhoods. Such a rapid spatial expansion and associated population growth and redistribution inevitably has far-reaching implications for the environment, economy, and society. It is a point that must be stressed and re-stressed in any discourse on Lagos.

Indeed, of the eight divisions into which Lagos State was once divided, only two fell within the municipality four decades ago, whereas today, only Epe and Badagry have some stretches of land that could be described as rural and lying outside the metropolis. Its metropolitanization has advanced so

far that, following the classification by Olowu,<sup>3</sup> we can neatly divide contemporary Lagos into three distinct zones. These are (a) the *Municipality*, consisting of an area of 70 square kilometers and made up of Lagos Island, Ikoyi, Victoria Island, Iddo, and closely contiguous parts of the Mainland; here, there is virtually no remaining space for development although wetland conversions of swamps and filling of the lagoons have created new government-controlled settlements in Ikoyi and beyond Victoria Island in Lekki; (b) the *Inner Metropolitan Zone*, which consists of most of the continuously built-up parts of the Lagos Mainland including such areas as Mushin, Somolu, Ilupeju, Surulere, Oshodi, and Ikeja; again, extensive in-filling of depressions and land reclamation constitute the main processes of settlement formation therein; and (c) the *Outer Metropolitan Zone*, which consists of more distant centers of the metropolitan economy such as Agege, Ketu, Ojo, Ipaja, and Ajah as well as the fast industrializing towns in nearby Ogun State, namely Sango-Ota, Ota, and Agbara.

In terms of periodization, the key observation is that after the steady though somewhat uneven growth and expansion of Lagos up to the time of independence in 1960, the data (even after adjusting for gaps and quality problems) indicate that the population of Lagos doubled between around 1965 and 1975, and doubled again between 1975 and 1985. The rate of growth then declined to slightly below 5 percent per annum by the early 1990s after the city had already exceeded a population of 5 million. Indeed, it is noteworthy that whereas Lagos was only one of many medium-sized Yoruba towns up to the mid-1960s,<sup>4</sup> it was by the late 1990s the only urban center in West Africa that, by virtue of its population size, areal extent, and the cosmopolitan composition of many of its neighborhoods, qualified to be called a mega-city. There is perhaps no adult Nigerian today who has never visited or lived in Lagos or who has no close ties with a resident of Lagos. Current fertility and in-migration indices, however, suggest that although the population of Lagos will continue to grow for at least another twenty-five years, this would be at increasingly slower rates.

The unmanageability of the exceptional spatio-demographic transformation of Lagos is clearly revealed in the concomitant escalation of its housing, solid waste, and poverty problems as summarized in Table 1. The data indicate, for example, that the city's housing situation has worsened by more than tenfold since the early 1960s, while the proportion of residents living below the poverty line has tripled within the same period.

- a Indicative estimates based on national consumer, employment, and income survey data as analyzed by the World Bank.<sup>5</sup> The poverty line is set at N395 per person per annum at 1985 prices.
- b Indicative of new dwelling units needed to absorb the poorly housed and unaccommodated population of Lagos during the relevant period given prevailing building efforts, estimated number of households, an average household size of 4-5, the estimated annual population growth rate of 5-6 percent, previous deficits in housing supply, and rate of physical deterioration of existing housing stock.
- c Based on survey data indicating per capita generation of 0.5-1.0 kg per day; note that "000" refers to "in thousands."
- d Refers to the actually developed land out of the estimated 47,000 hectares available for development.

In terms of explanation, the following factors, which are all acknowledged to have been mutually reinforcing, feature prominently in the urban research literature:

(1) The historical advantages that Lagos has enjoyed as a natural harbor within a colonial economy oriented to serving the raw materials needs of the British industrial economy, and its reinforcement by the postindependence import-substitution industrialization strategy. The pull of Lagos is presented as being clearly linked to the fact that Nigeria's air, road, and rail transport networks have been built

to revolve around Lagos, which in turn ensured that it became the commercial and industrial nerve center of Nigeria. Lagos remains the single most important location of job opportunities and social amenities, and, until 1991, the locus of state power and its numerous attendant benefits.

(2) The construction of major railway lines, roads, and bridges which accelerated the integration of hitherto autonomous nearby towns and villages into the metropolis. In the post-1970 era, the construction of the Ikorodu Road, the Third Mainland bridge, and the Lagos-Badagry, Victoria Island-Epe, and Lagos-Abeokuta highways (financed largely from crude oil export earnings) have been widely noted to have sped up the metropolitanization of Lagos.

(3) The pressure of human numbers on the built-up areas in the context of the economic boom (1967-79) and bust (mid-1980s—late 1990s) effects (including the impact of the structural adjustment program) on land values and associated land use patterns. The emphasis is on how the identified economic trends have tended to squeeze more and more of the poor majority into outlying areas; and

(4) Federal and state government policies, strategies, and programs on land acquisition, land use regulation or zoning, infrastructure, and housing development have also helped to shape the dynamics of metropolitanization in Lagos. For example, dating back to the colonial period, the central government's land reclamation schemes have helped the core Island areas (the Municipality) and its periphery to absorb increasing population as well as reduce the physical gulf between it and the rest of the metropolis (that is, the mainland areas).

## **The Missing Piece: The Poor as "Pioneers" in the Metropolitan Process**

In much of the analysis summarized above, it has been difficult searching for the real human beings in the metropolitanization process and their place in it as agents, not just as beneficiaries or passive victims, as many scholars tend to imply. A resort to some autobiography, as a way of looking at the recent history of Lagos, therefore becomes necessary at this point.

In the mid-1970s, as an adolescent, I experienced Isolo and it was presented to me as being limited to the area around the palace of the traditional ruler (the Osolo of Isolo) as well as the main thoroughfare, Aina Street. Nearby settlements such as Oke-Afa, Egbe, and Ejigbo were viewed by Isolo's middle-class residents as havens for criminals and social misfits. In reality, these areas accommodated hundreds and, fairly soon, thousands of recent migrants. Some of them farmed lands leased from customary owners as well as land speculators, whose real interest was in securing their possession or ownership of these assets. For many others, these settlements were the locus of their productive activities as artisans and small-scale entrepreneurs, and for some others it was both home and place of work. Many therefore engaged in land clearing, various land improvement activities, and progressive housing development. By the mid-1980s, the foundational settlement activities of the mass of the early residents had pushed up the value of land throughout Isolo area. Its extensions consequently became progressively dissociated from criminality and marginality.

As an increasing number of the oil boom—created middle-income earners moved into these hitherto fringe neighborhoods, state-funded road, infrastructural, and housing developments and greater investments by the organized private sector followed. Consequently, the neighborhoods not only became fully absorbed into an expanded Isolo but transformed in status from being wholly blighted

to differentiated neighborhoods with significant presence of middle/ high-income earners and associated living conditions. In the interim, some of the poor early settlers were squeezed into small islands of deprivation and squalor, while most have become part of new urban frontier extension processes joined by more recent migrants.

The foregoing brief personal account on Isolo's development during the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s can be repeated for Ojota in relation to Ogudu during the early 1980s to the early 1990s based on my experience and observations as a resident there for much of this period. Such stories would also, in all likelihood, be told of many other neighborhoods by witnesses to their growth, including old Ikeja (the capital of Lagos state) in relation to such extensions as Opebi, Agidingbi, and Alausa. In fact, a similar interpretation can be made of the state coercion-aided extension of Victoria Island into Maroko, which forcibly displaced over 300,000 poor people in 1990.<sup>6</sup> This is made easier if we remember that although many people in Maroko lived in squalor, the larger community was made quite habitable through self-help initiatives and social amenities established by the government, including two banks, a public library, a police station, an area office for the Eti-Osa Local Government, eight primary schools, a secondary school, and 15,000 residential buildings. Today, the land once occupied by the Maroko community which was later parceled out to highranking military officers and private developers features huge mansions, an elite secondary school, and business offices, while less than 5 percent of former Maroko residents were resettled.

The point about the transformation of the social and economic status of hitherto marginal settlements into broadly middle-class, medium-density neighborhoods is brought out clearly via a reflective long-standing resident's examination and interpretation of Table 2. The table shows 42 settlements across the Lagos metropolis which were classified by the early 1980s by the Lagos state government as blighted on account of having the following features (among others):

- Flooding area / Environmental pollution
- Dirty environment / Uncontrolled waste
- Overcrowded area / Overcrowded households
- Squatted area / Unauthorized construction
- Low-income people / Poor or bad building conditions
- Poor building materials / No ventilation space between buildings
- Unplanned road network / Traffic congestion / Difficult access
- No health clinics / Insufficient schools / No police station

The interesting observation to make is that these settlements as of 1980/81 were overwhelmingly the residential and work locations for the mass of recent migrants and the long-resident poor. Twenty years later, and partly because of the pioneering role of the poor majority in the transformation of these parts of the growing metropolis, several of these settlements would no longer qualify to be described as blighted. In fact, if the present writer's observational assessments are correct, at least one-fifth of the 42 settlements that were considered *blighted* during the early 1980s no longer qualified to be so described by the year 2000.

Also noteworthy is the tendency for the "newer" areas of these now differentiated settlements, inhabited almost exclusively by poor recent migrants two decades ago, to become the abode of middle/ high-income groups.

## The Complete Story

The account provided in the preceding section suggests to us that an analysis of the development of Lagos as a metropolis and the associated problems would be incomplete without sufficient attention to the active role of the mass of people that helped and still helps to define the form and content of Lagos spatially, economically, and environmentally. Metropolitanization has demographic, structural, and behavioral dimensions. But the interconnections between them only become clear and meaningful when the activities and everyday situations of the majority of the human actors within the process are brought into focus. The lesson here is that urbanists must take due account of the *new frontiers* and the foundational and reconstructive role of the poor majority of residents in any interpretation of the rapid growth of Lagos into a mega-city and the associated problems.

## II. The Problems Associated with the Rapid Metropolitanization of Lagos

The scale, range, and severity of the problems of contemporary Lagos are largely a consequence of the speed with which the city grew, which perhaps was inevitable given the interaction of history, geography, and politics. The list is long: housing shortage, environmental pollution, high incidence of crime and organized violence, transportation crisis, flooding, unemployment, etc., etc. But at the heart of these problems is weak macroeconomic performance, which makes it particularly difficult to finance the development and maintenance of urban infrastructure and services, as well as urban policy design and implementation failures, which compound the effects of a feeble economy.<sup>7</sup>

### Metropolitanization without Sustained Economic Growth: Effects and Responses

Lagos acquired the status of a genuine mega-city at about the same time that Nigeria was beginning her fast-track transition from a lower-middle-income country (with GDP per capita of over \$1,000) by the mid to late 1970s, to one of the world's poorest countries with a GDP per capita of less than \$300 by the year 2000. Among the particularly threatening fallouts of this situation are widespread unemployment, an urban transport crisis, a crippling housing shortage, huge waste-management problems, and a grossly ill-equipped local urban administration. Indeed, the costs of ensuring acceptable standards of environmental management and urban services provision have clearly been beyond the resources of the state and local governments.

Moreover, it is the case that official responses to the national economic crisis via structural adjustment has worsened the breadth and depth of poverty among the residents of Lagos, with the incidence of relative poverty in the city roughly doubling from 17 percent in 1980 to over 30 percent by the late 1990s.<sup>8</sup> But one way that the poor majority has responded to these adverse trends has been to devise more creative ways of coping with and transcending the challenges posed by metropolitanization without economic expansion. This is best observed in the ongoing growth and differentiation of micro-entrepreneurship within the metropolitan economy.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, it is quite clear that with the imposition of structural adjustment, the metropolitan informal economy has greatly expanded, perhaps increasing by 20 percent to about 70 percent of the workforce between 1980 and the late 1990s.<sup>10</sup> This is in line with the argument that among the four categories of the poor across urban Nigeria, that is, the entrepreneurial poor, the self-employed poor, the laboring poor, and the vulnerable poor, the fastest growing sub-group throughout the 1990s was the entrepreneurial poor.

This sub-group is estimated to have grown by 61 percent between 1992 and 1999 in the context of rising urban poverty levels.<sup>11</sup>

Evidence abounds of the increasing absorption of school leavers, university graduates, and retrenched public- and private-sector middle-level workers into the informal economy. And their absorption is not just into the traditional petty trading and artisanal activities, but increasingly into more value-creating and employment-generating lines of productive and commercial activities like printing, waste recycling, transportation, security service provision, secretarial and information technology services, and cottage industrial production. There is also some evidence of the increasing cooperativization of the sector as a strategy for raising additional capital and extending access to middle-to-high ends of the market.<sup>12</sup> However, state response to the challenge of growing this sector through credit, export market exploration, training, and technical support has been neither coordinated nor sustained. In fact, many operators within the sector report that they experience only harassment and sanctions from public officials in government's poor attempts at regularizing and formalizing the sector.<sup>13</sup>

## The Urban Management Challenge

Three obstacles bedevil official responses in terms of the management of the problems associated with the rapid metropolitanization of Lagos. These are:

(1) The lack of coordination (and conflicts over statutory responsibilities) between the three tiers of government, especially since the seat of the federal government moved to Abuja. This is illustrated by the frequent occurrence of disagreements between the federal government and the Lagos state government during the late 1990s about primary responsibility for the maintenance of so-called federal roads in Lagos, which resulted in most of them falling into a state of utter disrepair. The same problem has also been shown to be affecting the collection and disposal of solid waste.<sup>14</sup> This is particularly so as regards the division of responsibilities for the control of industrial waste from cottage factories between the state and local government in Lagos.<sup>15</sup> Even for waste from industrial and commercial firms, which is mostly dumped wherever convenient, the lack of coordination between the Federal Environmental Protection Agency, the Lagos State Waste Management Authority, and the local councils may be exacerbating the situation.<sup>16</sup> A related dimension to this administrative quagmire is the lack of collaboration and functional interdependence between agencies providing related services, for example, the water utility, sanitation management, and traffic control agencies in relation to waste disposal.

2) The unhealthily top-down urban policy development and implementation in Lagos. For example, despite the knowledge that the huge urban housing problem of Nigeria cannot be solved by the federal and state governments building and delivering houses to the needy, this approach has remained dominant since the 1970s. Targets always turn out to be grossly ambitious and the houses often end up being too expensive and/or poorly located to be accessible and attractive to the poor.<sup>17</sup> In fact, the mass housing construction and delivery programs embarked upon between 1970 and the late 1990s by the two tiers of government all achieved success rates of less than 20 percent, with the rate for the Lagos metropolis being always lower at around 10-13 percent.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, the completed houses inevitably turn out to be unaffordable to the low income and lower-to-middle income groups for which they were planned due mainly to cost overruns associated with construction delays, hyperinflation, and reliance on high-import-content building materials. Margaret Peil cites the example of a middle-income housing estate in Ebute-Metta built in the late 1980s which ended up being offered at N140,000 for a three-bedroom flat at a time that the middle-income level was less than N20,000 per year.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, in 2002, the Lagos state government is offering

dwelling units for sale which range in price from N2.8 million for a two-bedroom flat to N15.5 million for a four-bedroom terrace house.<sup>20</sup> This is in a context of a practically nonexistent mortgage finance sector and average annual household income of less than N30,000. Cooperative housing and upgrading of residential buildings of the poor which require partnership with the local organizations of poor people continue to be ignored in planning for and responding to the acute housing problem of the Lagos metropolis. The same point applies to the collection of waste through a central authority when many urban neighborhoods cannot be accessed by conventional waste collection trucks.

(3) The problem of technical and managerial capacity within the public sector for dealing with such problems as flooding, industrial waste management, transport administration, financial management, and crime prevention/control has also been alluded to by many scholars.<sup>21</sup> This problem is further compounded by high turnover in the leadership of urban administration units and conflicting policy guidelines on such matters as transport and waste management.<sup>22</sup> For example, despite the progressive commercialization of its services since 1991, the Lagos State Waste Management Authority's operations have not improved significantly. It continues to suffer from internal inefficiencies associated with inadequate controls over stores and finances, suboptimal cost-recovery performance, and paucity of skilled technicians. The result is that less than 50 percent of its equipment is operational and it is only able to collect one-third of the metropolitan area's waste.<sup>23</sup>

### **III. Popular Engagement with the Challenges of Metropolitanization in Lagos: Two Examples**

As suggested earlier, the poor majority's role in shaping the metropolitanization of Lagos has been two-sided. On the one hand, they have, as demonstrated above, driven the areal extension and population redistribution within the evolving metropolis in direct and significant ways. But on the other hand, they have also responded creatively to the challenges thrown up by the rapid growth of Lagos in ways that provide pointers to some opportunities that could be harnessed in planning and executing interventions for making the metropolis a more functional and hospitable city. We now turn to two case studies that help to substantiate the second point.

#### **The Refuse Problem Example: Lessons from Lagos Dumpsites**

Given the population growth and land use patterns prevalent in Lagos, I have often wondered as a resident with a pair of demographic lenses why the refuse problem of Lagos is not worse than it is currently. This curiosity led me to dumpsites and their surrounding communities during the 1990s where I learned a lot about the various stakeholders in the waste collection, recycling, processing, and disposal chain as well as the opportunities that exist for wealth creation and environmental protection through a poor people—centered approach to solid waste management in Lagos. This experience prompted my participation in a rapid assessment study on waste management and communities in Lagos, conducted in 2000.

The study led by Odunaiya and Ugbe entailed the use of individual interview schedules, in-depth discussion guides, site visit inventories, and site visit photography to elicit data on the practices and perspectives of a wide range of stakeholders in waste management in Lagos.<sup>24</sup> The focus was on the three official dumpsites, all on the mainland, that is, in Abule-Egba to the northwest, Olusosun (Ojota) in the north-central part of the metropolis, and Iyana-Ipaja, to the west-central axis. Interviewees included waste managers within the relevant Lagos state governmental agencies (the Ministry of



Environment and Physical Planning, the Waste Management Authority — LAWMA — and the state Environmental Protection Agency), waste generators (residential /domestic, market areas/commercial, and industrial), waste collectors (cart pushers, government-appointed private-sector contracts, and LAWMA), waste processors, dumpsite neighborhood communities (voluntary settlers and others), and dumpsite service providers (scavengers, food sellers, and others). Some of the salient findings were:

(1) LAWMA has no facilities whatsoever for waste treatment at the dumpsites under its management and none of the local government authorities have a defined department with sole responsibility for waste management.

(2) Scavengers turn out in large numbers to sort and collect various items at dumpsites and are unwilling to quit the job because it is more financially rewarding than a salaried job. They sell their products to small-scale itinerant buyers on a cash-and-carry basis, and the latter in turn sell to the bigger buyers, usually waste recycling plant operators. But their livelihoods have become threatened by the phasing out of transfer loading systems and promotion of sealed bags for waste collection, following the introduction of private-sector participation by the state government.

(3) A huge amount of waste is sorted and processed daily at the dumpsites. The prominent items collected include used cartons, paper, plastics (except thermoses), metals, cans, bottles and broken glasses, disused tires, textiles, and a wide variety of nylons.

(4) The banning of cart pushers has adversely affected the operations of scavengers as it limits the range and size of waste they can collect and transfer, and with the ban has come more harassment by local government officials.

(5) There is some degree of cooperativization among operators at the dumpsites. Particularly active were associations of scavengers and waste recycling cooperatives. They meet regularly to set negotiation terms, fix prices of their products, and provide social support to members. Some of the older scavengers have apprentices and expressed a strong willingness to work through their association to establish a waste recycling plant so as to reduce their dependence on middlemen and therefore expand their profit margins.

(6) Formal sector industrial and commercial firms routinely purchase waste products originating from the dumpsites such as ground plastic, copper, horns and bones from cow by-products. One plastics manufacturing firm which produces jerry cans, combs, baskets, cloth hangers, and cosmetics jars was observed to be heavily reliant on ground plastic supplied by local plastic grounders who obtain their raw materials from plastic scraps supplied by scavengers operating within the studied dumpsites.

(7) Health and safety risks abound in the waste-to-wealth business, especially injuries from sharp objects and respiratory problems from intense exposure to polluted air and stench.

(8) There are at least seven groups of actors (scavengers, cart pushers, waste sorters/cleaners/packers, suppliers of recyclable materials including waste converters, buyers including waste product exporters, dumpsite service providers like food sellers, and official waste managers) making a living out of the dumpsite-centered waste management chain. Given this multiplicity of stakeholders, a holistic approach is required to better handle the problem of waste management at Lagos dumpsites.

(9) Opportunities exist via partnership between government, the private sector, and scavenger/scrap collectors, waste processing, and recycling groups for scaling up waste-to-wealth businesses via

capital injection, skills training, and simple machine procurement to process more waste and create more wealth out of waste. This can and should be a key weapon in the management of metropolitan Lagos given its very poor solid waste and unemployment situation.

## Urban Local Governance: Insights from Two Poor Neighborhoods

The literature on urban development in Africa clearly acknowledges the role of community organizations formed or dominated by residents of low-income settlements in the economic and social development of cities. The point is frequently made that the urban poor routinely intervene to compensate for the failure of formal governance structures to deliver services and provisions that meet their employment, land ownership, housing, health, and environmental protection needs. The reasons for this situation include increasing state withdrawal from the provision of social infrastructure and services associated with Africa's long-running economic crisis; the distance, policy indifference, and sometimes outright hostility of central and provincial governments to poor urban settlements; as well as the huge capacity deficits of municipal administrations across much of urban Africa.<sup>25</sup> This situation is however sometimes discussed in ways that seem to imply that the urban poor play a rather inconsequential role in urban politics, especially vis-a-vis their engagement with decision-making processes. Indeed., many studies of popular initiatives in Nigerian towns and cities essentially present poor people's community organizations as moderately effective vehicles for welfare provisioning, social development, and poverty alleviation.<sup>26</sup>

But if we adopt a less formalistic definition of politics as being about who gets *what, where, and when*, a different interpretation of the role of poor people's community-based organizations (CBOs) in urban political processes would begin to emerge. Central to city politics in this context is the issue of governance, defined as:

*relations between the state and other institutions, including private business and civil society. It represents the relationship between the government and the governed, encompassing issues of accountability and empowerment, particularly of those normally marginalized. ... Governance can be defined as the means and processes through which a city ... fulfils its functions effectively.*<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, the data and insights that the present writer became familiar with as a member and later convenor of the Lagos Group for the Study of Human Settlements (LGSHS) from 1992 to 1997 seem to underline the significance of the role of popular initiatives in the relative orderly functioning of metropolitan Lagos despite the prevalence of all the ingredients required for it to be in a permanent state of social disorder, communal feuds, and inter-group conflict.

The LGSHS is a collective of sociologists, geographers, educators, economists, historians, and demographers founded at the beginning of the 1990s by academics based within higher education institutions in the Lagos metropolitan area. It works to promote greater understanding and the adoption of sustainable solutions to the key human settlement problems of the Lagos metropolis through research and technical assistance to CBOs struggling to overcome environmental and livelihood problems within their low-income unplanned settlements. The focus of much of its research and action work between 1990 and 1997 were six of the most blighted settlements in Lagos — Badia, Oluwa community in Ajegunle, Iwaya, Makoko, Olaleye-Iponri, and Wasimi. The research findings pertaining to the problems and the struggles for sustainable development in four of these settlements have been published in earlier studies.<sup>28</sup> The settlements that have not been highlighted so far are Wasimi and Oluwa community in Ajegunle. Both communities are located on the Lagos mainland — Wasimi to the north-central belt of the metropolis within five kilometers of Ikeja, the state capital, and

Oluwa community in Ajegunle, to the southern end of the metropolis, about seven kilometers from the seaport of Apapa. Both are populated overwhelmingly by poor recent migrants and long-settled residents. But while Ajegunle residents are largely factory workers, casual laborers, and self-employed petty traders/artisans (and their families) serving the industrial and seaport sectors in nearby Apapa, Wasimi, being located on marshy land next to Iya-Alaro River, is populated mainly by fishermen, fishery products processors, natural resource—based artisans like basket weavers, and low-level clerical workers employed by establishments in and around Ikeja.

Between 1995 and 1997, the LGSHS conducted eight focus group discussions each, numerous site observational assessments, and many strategic informant interviews in Wasimi and Oluwa with a view to understanding the role of the community development associations (CDAs) in sustainable development struggles and in local governance. Numerous capacity-building workshops were also held for the leaders and select members of the CDAs on basic management techniques, conflict resolution, lobbying, and project planning and administration. The qualitative research and observational assessments threw up a number of interesting findings regarding the role of CDAs in urban local governance in metropolitan Lagos.

First, the CDAs in Wasimi and Oluwa community were both initiated by landowning early settlers in the late 1960s. But by the mid-1980s, they had fully transformed into officially registered (with the local government), broadbased membership grassroots organizations (having tenants as the majority) with a nonpartisan, nonreligious, not-for-profit, and nonethnic mission to work for the *general upliftment, security, and interests* of their communities. By the early 1990s, both had evolved a two-tier governance structure comprising the general assembly (that is, all dues-paying members), which meets quarterly, and an executive committee (a small group made up of the founding members and other persons elected to represent other interest groups within the community — youth, women, traditional/religious institutions, and vocational groups), which meets every month to assess and ensure the implementation of decisions sanctioned by the general assembly. In both CDAs, women are seriously under-represented, being disadvantaged by the dues-paying basis of membership and the time-demanding nature of their meetings. Nevertheless, as of 1997, Oluwa CDA had four women in its twelve-person executive committee and two women as opposed to four men on a sort of elders' council. Both CDAs also kept financial records and minutes of meetings, and maintained bank accounts. Overall, the LGSHS found in both communities a strong sense of acceptance of the CDA as the legitimate intermediary between the residents and the different tiers of government, powerful private external interests, other communities, and the traditional authority institutions.

Second, as found by Onibokun and Faniran in an extensive 1994 study of indigenous CBOs in towns and cities across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria (excluding Lagos), the Oluwa and Wasimi CDAs were observed to be vanguards in infrastructural development, environmental services and sanitation improvement, and general socioeconomic progress of their communities.<sup>29</sup> In both places, and in spite of modest success in internally generating financial resources through dues, levies, and fund-raising campaigns, the CDAs successfully paved streets, constructed security gates, routinely cleared and cleaned their surroundings (including dealing with the aftermath of flooding), maintained public water pipes and taps, and devised vigilante security arrangements for dealing with the problem of armed robbery.

Third, and more striking, were the longer-term solutions that the CDAs had fashioned in response to the major problems of their communities deriving from their peculiar circumstances. In the case of Wasimi community, a portion of its land area had been under threat of acquisition by powerful individual and corporate interests because of its high value linked to its proximity to the state capital and several high-income, low-density residential neighborhoods. Led by its CDA, in the early 1980s

the community began a primary and secondary school development project on the stretch of disputed land and attracted media interest to the issue as a way of securing use of the land. Subsequently, despite initial setbacks, including the illegal demolition of some of the structures that had been put up on the site, the state government, in response to lobbying from the CDA and pressure from other voluntary associations external to the community, took over the development of the school, equipped and staffed it, and got it running as a public school. This solution was what the community desired all along. The school provided its children easier access to the public education system, which was and remains tuition-free, and, moreover, it became a natural barrier against further incursion into the community's land. In addition, as a result of this experience, the Wasimi CDA was to later collaborate with CDAs of neighboring communities to establish the Maryland Community Bank, which continues to function profitably.

In the case of Oluwa community, on the other hand, the main problem was and remains that of security of lives and property as a result of the high incidence of violent crime, especially armed robbery in the larger Ajegunle area. So serious is the problem that both residents and nonresidents often refer to Ajegunle as the *jungle city*. The CDA's response was to go beyond a conventional vigilante security arrangement by recruiting community youth as paid security guards. These were then given basic security training, routinely provided arms for their night patrols, and worked with the CDA officials to gather information on persons suspected to be planning or engaged in criminal activities. With an unwritten agreement with the local police station to share this information, suspected criminals were regularly arrested, interrogated, and prosecuted when necessary without much fuss. By the second half of the 1990s, the system had developed to a point where police personnel routinely treated as reliable the intelligence data from the Oluwa CDA and tended to act promptly on it. In addition, the community became popular within the larger Ajegunle area as a safe haven, leading to a situation in which many residents of nearby communities resorted to parking their cars within Oluwa community at night in return for a fee in the assurance that their vehicles will not be stolen by armed robbers.

A key inference that has to be drawn from this discussion is that the community organizations of the urban poor do play a sufficiently significant role in local governance to be viewed as the fourth tier of government in Lagos metropolis. Judging by the findings from Wasimi and Oluwa, it can be said that organized efforts by the urban poor to engage with formal governance structures help to make their communities more liveable, secure, and governable. Strategic partnerships with other CBOs seem to have been perfected by the urban poor for leveraging resources for the better functioning of their communities. As observed in the activities of the two CDAs over a period of three years, grassroots organizations of the urban poor in Nigeria constitute a veritable vehicle for urban governance, especially since there are no specific statutory provisions for the administration of urban centers. This is a finding that has not been sufficiently highlighted within the urban research literature on Nigeria when compared to studies on other African cities like Accra, Harare, and Cairo.<sup>30</sup> It may well be that more sustained, extended, and deeper forms of social investigation of poor urban communities are required for the patterns reported here to be uncovered than has been done so far by previous studies.

## Conclusion

The purpose of the foregoing discourse has not been to create the impression that life for the majority of Lagos residents is rosy and free of hardship. It is not and has never really been so. The social, economic, and environmental conditions within the metropolis make life for the majority a daily struggle. But the story is not all about coping or not coping in the face of overwhelming forces. As

with other socioeconomic groups, the poor majority has and is creatively responding to the challenges of economic livelihood, waste management, assetbuilding, and local governance. While these efforts could be easily dismissed as being of low value using conventional cost-benefit analysis, they represent, in my opinion, the only genuine building blocks for truly transforming Lagos into a more liveable and manageable metropolis.

Spatio-demographic changes have occurred and are occurring at a pace that far outstrips the ability of government to respond adequately. Given the bleak prospects for economic growth and the weakness of existing urban management structures, Lagos can aspire to functioning sustainably only if the government, working with the organized private sector, actively collaborates with local organizations of the poor majority (that help to organize popular initiatives) on two fronts. First, to ascertain real needs, and second, to judiciously deploy available resources for the sustainable development of the component settlements of Lagos. It is difficult to imagine how the enormous challenges of Lagos can be effectively addressed without involving and empowering those most affected and who everyday find ways to modify and moderate the impact of the problems.

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