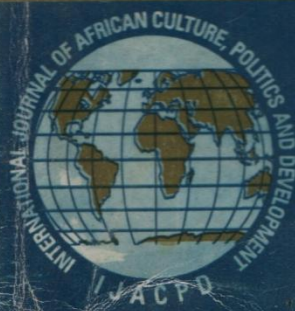


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URBANISATION AND HEALTH PROBLEMS IN AKWA IBOM STATE: FOCUS ON UYO URBAN CITY

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Abstract

Urban cities in Nigeria and indeed, the developing countries today are faced with multifarious problems. This paper sets out to critically examine urbanization and health problems in Akwa Ibom State with particular references to Uyo urban city. The work critically analyses these problems and found that these have a debilitating effect on Uyo City dwellers. Based on this, the work recommends that the government should vigorously pursue urban renewal and expansion as a way forward.

Introduction

Urbanization is commonly believed to be a major challenge of the development process in Third World Societies. Perhaps, one of the most crucial problems confronting Nigeria and indeed, the developing countries today centres on how to solve the multifarious problems posed by rapid urbanization. Reports indicate phenomenal acceleration of urbanization in the developing countries since after the Second World War. For instance, less developed nations recorded 17% level of urbanization in 1950, which increased to 37.1% in 1990, and 41.2% in 1995. The projection was that as much as 61.2% would be recorded in the year 2025. With particular reference to Nigeria, The United Nations reported 10.1% level of urbanization in 1950, 39.3% in 1995, and a projection of 61.6% by the year 2025. (Ezeani and Elekwa 2001).

In the light of the above projection, in 1997, the Nigerian Institute of Town planners alerted the nation on the possible problems of accelerated growth in urbanization in Nigeria when it emphasized that while Nigerian cities are growing at an alarming rate with adverse consequences to the quality of life, little is being done by the policy-makers and the population at large to ensure a sustainable, sane, and healthy development of the cities, (Abiodun 1998 quoted in Ezeani and Elekwa 2001).

The aim of this paper, therefore, is to examine the various health problems associated with urbanization in Akwa Ibom State with particular reference to Uyo, urban city. This paper will examine conceptual meaning of urbanization as well as theoretical framework to guide the work.

Conceptualizing Urbanization

A precise and universal definition of urbanization is difficult. Not surprisingly, as Adedeji and Rowland (1984) have observed, almost every country has evolved its own definition. This, not unexpectedly, is often arbitrary, and based on compromise between comparability, relevance and the expediency of available statistics or methods of estimating them.

Taking Nigeria as an example, then, urbanization can be depicted as the demographical and physical growth in towns and cities. Because of the colonial origin of this trend, most observers believe that the urbanization process in Nigeria has an intrinsic westernization orientation and thus is inseparable from the country's overall modernization bid (Adamolekun 1985).

According to the National Population Commission (NPC) 1991 Nigerian census, urbanization is a compromise of the process of modernization of the economy and society, and it is a major influence on the re-distribution of population in any country (Yesuf, 2000). Okonjo (1994) sees urbanization as a social process of change whereby a sizeable proportion of the population of the country lives in cities.

The United Nations Secretariat (1970) states that urbanization is perhaps, the best symbol of the radical, physical, economic and social transformation that mankind is passing through as a consequence of development. This means that urbanization necessitates development by being a tool of and also a product of development.

Finally, the New Encyclopedia Britannica (vol. 12) defines urbanization as the process by which a large number of people become permanently concentrated in relatively small areas, forming cities. From the above, thus, it can be deduced that urbanization denotes the movement of people from small rural communities concerned chiefly with agriculture to other large communities, whose activities are primarily centered on government, trade, manufacture or allied interest. Such areas in Nigeria include Abuja, Lagos, Kaduna, Kano, Enugu, Port Harcourt, Aba, Onisha and Uyo being the focus of this study (Ezeani & Elekwa, 2001).

Theoretical Framework

There are two contending paradigms or perspectives to the study of urbanization namely, the Western liberal or modernization school which view is based on capitalist assumption. The other school is Marxist or Radical school. This work is predicated on the Marxist assumption or view with particular reference to the theory of peripheral urbanization. This theory posits that Third World development is constrained by and interacts with the global political economy. Within this theoretical perspective, cities are seen as loci for national and international economic exchanges that influence the intra and inter-urban structure. The very process of urbanization is, therefore, seen as both a cause and effect of uneven international development, (Walton, 1982).

Added to this and most importantly was the incorporation of the Third World economy into the world capitalist system in a disadvantaged position (as exporters of raw materials and primary products) is an important aspect of peripheral urbanization. This unequal exchange/dependent status within the international economy not only increased the rate of urban primacy that is, the pre-eminence of one or two urban areas in a country, but it alters the system of cities, generates increasing centralization of activities within cities, commercialization of agriculture, rural out-migration, and disrupt regional pattern of self-sufficiency and interdependence, (Ezeani & Elekwa 2001).

Historical Background of the Study

Uyo came into existence in 1905 as an administrative centre. This was when Mr. Brooks, the Captain of the British army unit that conquered this area made it the Headquarters of Uyo District. Between 1960 and 1967 Uyo served as the headquarters of the defunct Uyo province which covered Itu, Oron, Eket, Opobo and Uyo Division. From 1967 to 1976, Uyo once again was the Headquarters of Uyo Division controlling a much smaller territory than before. In 1976, Uyo became a local government Headquarters. From 1987, it became a State capital with the creation of Akwa Ibom State, as well as serving as a local government Headquarters. As urban centre or city, Uyo is teemed with the following activities, namely: commerce, industries, transportation, hospital and tourism, education, religion, health and financial institutions (Akpan & Ekong 2007).

Urbanization and Health Problems in Uyo Urban City

The increasing rate of urbanization is alarming as urbanization has its problems one of which is health. This paper will therefore examine some of these problems as it effects Uyo city dwellers in Akwa Ibom State namely; inadequate supply of safe water, poor housing, poor sanitary conditions, pollution, poverty, poor transportation system and changing cultural values, high crime rate and problem of cultism.

Inadequate Supply of Safe/Clean Water

Clean and safe water is essential for human life, industrial and sewage use. Inspite of its importance, water supply in Uyo is inadequate in both quantity and quality. People, therefore, often resort to water from private boreholes, streams, rains and local wells. Water from these sources are often known to have serious health problems such as cholera, diarrhea, guinea worm etc. Only 2% of the city has access to portable water (AKSEEDS 2007).

Diseases Associated with Unsafe Water Supply in Uyo City Table 1

S/N	WATER (PEOPLE)	DISEASE	%
1	Water Borne infection	Typhoid, cholera, dysentery	75%
2	Water-washed infection skin	Scabies, yaws and leprosy	15%
3	Eyes	Trachoma (Eye diseases) conductivities	10%
4	Water-Based infections	Schistosomiasis, Guinea worm	1%
5	Water-associated, insect borne infections-breeding in Water	Onchocerciasis (River blindness, malaria filarial,	8%

Source: Water and healths status 2006 survey by Ekong Daniel.

The fact also remains that, out of the Ninety (90) known streets in Uyo each of these streets has at least two or three boreholes operating. The number of boreholes operating in Uyo is said to fall between 2-5 thousands (Ekong 2007). The problem with the private boreholes is that they fail to meet the recommended level in which clean water is found. Some boreholes are drilled near septic tanks. Very few boreholes meet the stipulated standards.

It has been established that, government-owned water enterprises namely: Akwa Ibom Water Company Ltd has failed to deliver the services as expected. The reason is attributed to poor funding and inadequate executive capacity to manage the company efficiently. The current restructuring of the company by AKIPOC is a step toward right direction that is, for effective operation (Akpan 2007) and (AKSEEDS 2007).

Poor Housing Condition

Poor housing condition among city dwellers (Uyo) also constitute threats to adequate health. As a result of urbanization, many people from the rural areas migrate to Uyo cities in search of greener pasture. The overall effect is that the houses available are not enough to accommodate people leading to high occupancy ratio, Ezeani and Elekwa (2001). Areas with high rate of occupancy include; Ikpa Road and its adjoining, Ikot Ekpene Road, Wellington Bassey Road, Udo-Eduok Street, Oron Road, Abak Road, Nwaniba Road, Udoumana Road etc.

To meet the housing needs, people have resorted to living in shanties and over-crowded houses especially in flood prone areas namely Ikot Ekpene Road. Uruan Street, Nwaniba, Abak Road by Nkamba, Urua Ekpa Road etc.

Worth mentioning too is that because of the presence of the University of Uyo, with limited space in the hostel, thousands of students find themselves in over-crowded houses. Some living 4-5 in a room. This type of living condition is characterized by poor residential amenities such as absence of

flushed-toilet and poor ventilation, resulting in health threats associated with over crowding and slum dwelling Sule (1987) noted that overcrowding causes psychological and emotional problems resulting from friction in space, depression, frustration and stress as individuals consider themselves victim of deprivation. However, housing problems in Uyo city is heightened as a result of high rents charged by the landlords and high cost of building materials which the average city dweller in Uyo cannot afford.

Poor Sanitary Condition

Health condition of dwellers in Uyo is deteriorated as a result of the poor sanitary conditions of the city. Reports from UNO 1992, UNB No. 6. indicate that cities of the developing nations (which include Nigeria, and specifically Uyo) do not have good sanitation. The poor sanitation results from non-availability of toilets and improper waste management. Waste (consisting of household refuse, animal and human wastes) are dumped into nearby bushes and gutters. Human wastes for example, are disposed in nearby bushes and flowing gutters, and the city dwellers have direct or indirect contact with these wastes, and consequently contact such diseases as hookworm, tape worm and typhoid. Poor sanitation also leads to poor drainage and existence of stagnant waters, which become breeding grounds for insects such as mosquitoes and tsetse fly. This consequently leads to increase in the spread of various vector borne diseases among the city dwellers. Typical diseases caused by poor sanitation are malaria and cholera (Martins 1981). The condition of the markets are very deplorable as women sit near the refuse to sell such items as garri, pepper, cray-fish garden egg, it is not surprising to see them eat the garden egg while selling them.

A field survey conducted by Ekong (2007) reveal that Uyo city dwellers still make use of pit toilet even without solid structure. While 20% do not have such facilities due to lack of space. And the offensive odour generated by this type of toilet system has greatly affected the health of many living around such areas. It is disappointing to see that even churches with very large population in the heart of the city still use the pit system of toilet.

High Rate of Pollution

High rate of pollution constitute a threat to safe health condition among the city dwellers. Pollution comes mainly from industrial wastes, fumes from exhaust pipes of cars and motorcycles that are pumped directly into the environment. Going by MNE PIE (No. 39;8-II) as found in Ezeani & Elekwa (2001) attested that the scale of industrial pollution in the world now is so great that it is damaging to the ecosystem. It further stated that the toxic wastes form health risk to employee and neighbouring communities degraded air quality, which can lead to various respiratory diseases.

In Uyo, the situation is not different for instance, the citing of Champion Breweries along Aka Road, posses health problem and hazard to people living within. Also, a lot of pollutants from vehicles and motorbikes are emitted into the environment contaminating both air and water. The result is that the dwellers who are exposed to the emission and stand the risk of being infected by the diseases caused from this pollution. The traffic congestion in Uyo metropoplis is increasing. Akwa Ibom State motor commercial motorcyclists that were sent packing in Port Harcourt have increased the number of motorbikes in Uyo, thus increasing the rate of population. This is greatly felt while waiting for the traffic light. Added to the menace of population growth is the problem of the mad men and women who are found almost in all areas in Uyo metropolis. Some of these mad people sit near shops. Although the state government recently has improved on the strategies to eliminate refuse in the city, some areas still harbor heaps of refuse.

High Accident Rates

The high accident rate recorded in Uyo has been attributed to a number of factors which include, increasing population in the cities, bad roads and poorly maintained cars. It is well established that the use of motor bike popularly called "Okada" or "Aka Uke" has increased the rate of road accidents. The overall effect is that the city dwellers are exposed to the dangers of road accident, which in some cases may result in permanent disability or death. In Uyo, since the popular means of transportation is motorbike, a survey conducted by Umoh (2007) shows that 70% of road accidents were attributed to this means of transportation. Some victims had their legs or arms amputated while some remained completely maimed for life. This has been the experience of Uyo dwellers on a daily basis.

Changing Cultural Values

Urbanization has also caused some health problems among adolescents in Uyo due to changing cultural values. As a result of development of Uyo, people from different cultural backgrounds meet resulting to changes in cultural values. One of such values is the attitude towards pre-marital sex. The pre-marital sex life was frowned at, but with modernization, high educational attainments and the awareness the condone is more likely to prevent pregnancy is properly used had made pre-marital sexual relation to become more permissible. However, some of the adolescence still engage in sexual relations without adequate knowledge of safe sex. These sexual acts usually result in unwanted pregnancies and illegal abortion causing various health problems especially infertility among victims. Besides unwanted pregnancies and induced abortion, they are exposed to different types of sexually transmitted diseases such as Gonorrhoea, syphilis and AIDS (Hofman, 1984). Various jingles over the radio, on the television and billboards within the city (Uyo) testified to this. Some babies are deposited in gutters and their presence is only felt when the odour of the dead bodies are very offensive, or when those alive cry out.

Child Abuse

Urbanization has resulted in child abuse and subsequently health problems among children. The victims are usually house helps or maids. The use of maid in the homes is common in Uyo because, in most cases, the couples are engaged in white-collar jobs and hire the maids to mind the children. In some cases, these maids are exposed to various forms of harsh treatment from their guardians such as excessive beating, poor feeding, inadequate medical attention which lead to ill health and in some cases severe physical damage/impairment. It is a well-established fact that some maids worked for an average of 13-15 hours per day. Their jobs ranged from child minding to cooking, house cleaning, laundry, shopping, gardening and hawking. They hardly have enough rest needed for effective functioning of the body (Ebigbo, 1990). There have also been reported cases where a housewife threw boiling water on the housemaid, some are forced to sleep outside on a coldnight. Whichever form the maltreatment will take, the overall effect is on the health of these unfortunate ones.

High Crime Rate

Today, most Nigerian cities are overflowing with large armies of unemployed and underemployed able-bodied youth who roam the streets daily in search of non-existent jobs or other means of survival. Many of them want to become millionaire overnight, even without working for it. They want to own expensive and prestigious cars, build "mansions and palaces and ultimately to be able to influence the affairs of their communities using their newly acquired financial power (Igbo in Ezeani & Elekwa 2001).

Top on the list of the commonest crimes in Uyo urban city are: robbery, stealing, thurgery, house and stores breaking, arson, trading on stolen property, 419 offences, cyber crime, murder,

assault, rape, manslaughter, kidnapping, gambling, breaking of public fence, bribery and corruption, traffic offences, drug and narcotics, drunkenness etc. All these offences have become a way of life in Uyo city.

Notably, among these, is constant robbery attack occasioned by joblessness, poverty and idleness. Criminals operate openly in various parts of the city day and night. At times, most residents are afraid sleeping in their homes. Also the incessant cases of Bank robbery has added to the new twist where people are trailed from the bank and shot. Not to overlook is the use of motor bike to rob and maim innocent Uyo city dwellers. These incidences have given government much concern. This concern by the government is demonstrated by the formation of a combined team of police and other military outfits named "Oduma" to combat crime of any form. Despite these efforts by the government, the issues of crime in Uyo remain high.

Problem of Cultism

Cultism is a common feature in the Nigerian Universities. With the citing of a federation University namely, University of Uyo in the heart of the town with influx of people from other states of the federation has given rise to these unholy activities. The University authority, students and community can testify to this, as this hoodlums and social misfit have attacked some of them during their induction and or initiation of members. The activities of these hoodlums are not limited to University environment. They spread to secondary schools. Innocent children have been knowingly and unknowingly lured into this unholy association or fraternity resulting in the death of some students.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has established that Uyo urban experience severe health problems that need urgent attention by both policy makers and policy implementators. Nevertheless, any realistic effort towards this direction should not be left entirely to the state government, as Uyo is also the capital of Uyo local government.

Recommendations

Based on the aforementioned health problems experienced by Uyo city dwellers, the following recommendations are made to alleviate some of the problems.

1. Expansion of Uyo city beyond its present status to accommodate more people. This expansion will take cognizance of other small villages in terms of developing them for population dispersing.
2. Increase in the supply of safe water. This entails taking a second look at the activities of Akwa Ibom Water Company with a view to strengthening its administrative capability.
3. Government should check illegal sinking of boreholes and production of unregistered sachet/bottled water (Pure water).
4. Government should strengthen Akwa Ibom State Environment Protection (ASEPA) for effective collection and disposal of refuse in the city. This should also be complimented by private refuse collectors.
5. The government should make adequate budgetary allocations for the provision of social services, which include medical services, transportation and counseling.
6. More housing estates should be built. Government should allow private investors to venture into this area. This can be done by allocating land for such project.
7. Government of Nigeria and Akwa Ibom State should develop rural areas to discourage rural-urban migration.

8. Government should strengthen its poverty alleviation programmes especially in the area of skill acquisition to accommodate both secondary school leavers and University graduates.

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