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*Full Length Research Paper*

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# Urban planning problems in Onitsha Anambra State, Nigeria

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This study investigated the factors that lead to the rapid urbanization of Onitsha which is one of the urban centres in Nigeria, the constraints to effective provision of urban amenities, and the causes of poor urban planning. The findings showed that the presence of substantial social infrastructure in Onitsha has been the major factor that engendered its urbanization. It also revealed that there is rapid urbanization in relation to effective plans to provide adequate urban infrastructure to service this trend. Furthermore, there is a strong correlation between lack of good population projection, inaccurate census data and poor urban planning in Onitsha. Hence, these engender the bad effects of urbanization. The study calls for a revision of the existing planning practice to take into account the growth in the urban area, and the consequent increase in the demand for urban infrastructural services. It gave suggestions on ways to improve urban planning in Onitsha to include proper articulation and implementation of planning policies and programmes to address future influx of people in Onitsha urban.

**Key words:** Rapid urbanization, Onitsha, constraints, urban amenities, substantial social infrastructure, population projection, influx of people.

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## INTRODUCTION

Urban centers throughout the world exhibit an incredible diversity of characteristics, economic structure, levels of infrastructure, historical origins, patterns of growth and degree of formal planning. Yet, many of the problems they face are strikingly familiar. But in developing countries like Nigeria, urban residents suffer to a great extent from severe environmental and health challenges associated with insufficient access to clean drinking water, inadequate sewage facilities and solid waste disposal due to the rapid urbanization (United Nations, 2003).

The migration of thousands of rural folks to urban centers has resulted to both institutional and structural changes caused by economic and social growth. This rush to urban centers like Onitsha, attracted dire desires for opportunities for wealth creation and economic development, which created severe physical, ecological, economic and social problems. It is increasingly difficult

to manage this growth in a sustainable way. It is recognized that most of the growth taking place in Onitsha currently happens outside of the formal planning process and that an alarming number of the people living in Onitsha live in slums or informal settlements, where vacant state-owned or private land is occupied illegally and used for illegal slum housing (Achike, 1989).

Undoubtedly, crime, insecurity and escalated issues of urban mismanagement and dysfunctional institutional framework prevail in Onitsha. This has posed a serious problem to urban planning of Onitsha.

The purpose of this study is therefore to identify the different urban planning problems which emanated from rapid urbanization present in Onitsha and to proffer solution.

### Area of study

Onitsha is located in Anambra State, which is one of the 36 states of the Federation and one of five states in the South-East geo-political zone of the country. Onitsha, the

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gateway to eastern Nigeria and economic nerve center of Nigeria, is located on latitude 6009'N and longitude 6047'E of Nigeria. It occupies the eastern bank of River Niger, covering some 50 square kilometers. Onitsha is strategically located and accessed through the east – west national main road from Lagos through Benin which links the eastern north – south route via the Niger Bridge at Onitsha. The main concentration of population and industrial activity and the areas showing the greatest potential for growth are situated along this transportation axis. The recent process of urban expansion very largely reflects the communication network. Her location, which combines both road and waterway access points, makes her to be one of the four main potential industrial and commercial growth areas in Nigeria.

The city is split up into two local government areas namely, Onitsha South and Onitsha North local Government Areas. Onitsha North and South local Government Areas are bounded by Ogbaru local Government to the south, Idemili North and Oyi local Governments to the east and Anambra East local Government to the North.

### Literature review

In the developing countries of the world, cities are growing much more rapidly than in developed countries due to dire search for greener pastures in their developing cities. These are pronounced in countries like India, Malaysia, Indonesia, Ghana, Kenya etc. In which Nigeria also, is experiencing such rapid urban growth with significant increase in both the urban population and growth in the number of urban centers with special reverence to Onitsha.

Since the early 1950s rapid urbanization has been a characteristic feature of Nigeria. Recent demographic studies show that urban areas constitute about half of the national population (Oyesiku, 2010); while between 1953 and 2007 urban population rose from 10.6% to about 50% of the total population (UNDP, 2011). At independence in 1960, only 20% of the population was urban. By 1991, however, more than 40% of the total population was urban; doubling the urban center population only within a period of thirty years. Besides the rapid urban population rises in existing cities, more urban centers emerge with the creation of new states (Osuocha and Njoku, 2012). However, the exponential growth in urban population led to over-crowding and greater deficiencies of urban design elements in the cityscape (Elekwa, 2012).

Basic challenges of urban growth include: the rapid spatial growth of urban areas, expansion and management of services, the collection and allocation of sufficient revenues to create infrastructure to operate services in an adequate fashion, and creation of coherent planning framework for the city so that increasingly

diverse populations can live together civilly and productively.

Onitsha which is one of the most populated cities in Nigeria is face with the enormous challenges of urban planning problems which in turn affects the economic development. Urban growth for instance has a number of impacts on the environment and human well-being. Apart from the few impacts, Onitsha is plagued by environmental problems. In other words, there is great threat to health and safety in Onitsha courtesy of unguided urbanization and ineffective planning.

Oyesiku (2002) defined urban planning as an orderly spatial arrangement of the various land uses such as residential, industrial, commercial, recreation and open spaces, transportation, public infrastructure and other ancillary human activities. It is concerned with functional relationship among various land uses with a view to ensuring that services are available and accessible to all conveniently and efficiently.

The objective of urban planning is to create or provide a pleasant healthy environment for living, working, recreation and movement. In this regard, urban planning covers all spheres of human endeavor and all aspects of natural or man-made resources and yet performs a coordinating role to ensure harmony in the development of the environment in the urban centers. Hence, urban planning is an essential (social) service that every responsible government should provide for its people.

Onitsha, the focus of this research, is the most populous and rapidly expanding commercial and educational centre in Anambra State. As Onitsha started to engulf neighbouring villages of Nkpor, Nsugbe and Obosi, the Anambra state government then commissioned the Onitsha master plan in 1978 to check the physical development of the town. Originally the plan was designed to last for twenty years and has provisions for infrastructure based on the projected population of the town. The master plan of 1978 has hardly been subjected to modifications based on the trends of growth in terms of population and industrialization especially small scale industries. For instance certain areas are not zoned for residential or for industrial projects, but if the master plan is being modified it will meet and accommodate the needs of both industrial and residential purposes.

During the past decades, Onitsha has had more than its fair share of the problems which accompanied unplanned urban growth. These problems have attracted the attention of many scholars of repute who acknowledged Onitsha's many enviable past heritages as an important religious, commercial and educational centre while bemoaning its decline due to current failures of land use planning, management and the lack of security in the city due to bad governance.

For instance, Amujiri (2001) described Onitsha as an 'an admirable and sought-after city', being the 'largest market city in Nigeria, if not in West Africa', and a major 'center of education' with many famous colleges and has

**Table 1.** Showing urban problems distribution according to residents in Onitsha.

Problems	Number of respondents	% Distribution
Poor housing and living condition	122	18.83
Unemployment	126	19.44
Infrastructural degradation and decay	140	21.60
Crime and insecurity	134	20.68
Lack of effective and functional transport	126	19.44
Total	648	100%

developed its own 'intellectual climate', that 'manifested in numerous books (and pamphlets)' then referred to as "Onitsha market literature". He emphasized that Onitsha was a city of pilgrimage to which visitors from all over Nigeria and beyond sought to visit. From an open well-laid out and functional city, Onitsha today is 'a veritable bedlam! The city, has today, degenerated physically, environmentally, socially and morally to a point where it is no longer a livable city, and certainly not a sustainable city, if current trends continue'.

Some of the urban planning problems include: ineffective land use planning and development control and poor provision of basic services and environmental degradation, patterns of settlement, lack of involvement of operational agencies, lack of effective and functional transport system, inadequate qualified manpower, political interference, problems of housing and living conditions, crime and insecurity, lack of public support etc.

All the above mentioned urban planning problems make Onitsha unconducive for living.

Okpala attributed the city's degeneration to the failure of land use planning and infrastructural provision, specifically: "Physically and environmentally, Onitsha today shows no signs of any effective development control or regulation. Structures are built anyhow, anywhere. High rising buildings are constructed with hardly any road access to them, and with no water supplies even on the ground floors, much less on the higher floors. That the city is located on the banks of the great River Niger makes no difference to the paucity of its water supply. Several other sections/neighborhoods' of the city are a built up of unregulated, congested, ramshackle housing surrounded by indescribable filth. There are no drainage facilities or solid waste disposal facilities. Mountains of refuse are common features everywhere and they continue to creep increasingly into the limited road spaces

## METHODOLOGY

It is important to note that this study used primary to

collect information. The research used a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Information was also gathered from the staff of the Anambra State Urban Development Board (ASUDEB), staff of the Onitsha North and South LGA, civil servants, traders and residents who are affected by the urban planning problems existing problems in Onitsha. A total of 155 copies of questionnaires were administered and 140 copies were retrieved from respondents, 39 in Okpoko, Fegge, and '33' (Akpaka games reserve), 38 in Odoakpo neighbourhood. 80 of the respondents are males and 60 are females representing 57.1 and 42.9% of the sample population respectively.

## Presentation of findings on urban planning problems on residents in Onitsha

As identified in Table 1, a total of 140 copies of questionnaires were administered in the selected neighborhoods, (20.68%) of the respondents are affected by crime and insecurity, 19.44% of the respondents have the problems of lack of effective and functional transport, and unemployment, while 18.87% of the respondents revealed that they are affected by poor housing and living conditions.

Table 2 reveals the responses of respondents according to their perception on the constraints on effective urban planning in Onitsha. About 35.50% of the sampled total population of respondents revealed issues of management and institutional framework constitutes a big constraints to effective urban planning in Onitsha, while 16.57%, 15.68%, and 14.50% representing the total sampled population indicated that effective urban planning are constrained by lack of involvement of operational agencies, non-adherence to plan and political interference respectively. Then, 11.24% of the sampled total population revealed that uncontrolled urban growth by authorized agencies is also a constraint to the urban planning in Onitsha. 6.51% of the total sampled population showed that inadequate qualified manpower by the authorities constitutes constraint to the urban planning of Onitsha.

**Table 2.** Showing the constraints to effective urban planning in Onitsha.

<b>Constraints</b>	<b>No of respondents</b>	<b>% Distribution</b>
Political interference	49	14.50%
Non adherence to plan	53	15.68%
Uncontrolled Urban growth	38	11.24%
Lack of involvement of operational agencies	56	16.57%
Inadequate qualified manpower	22	6.51%
Issues of magt and institutional framework	120	35.50%
Total	338	100%

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### Problems of urban planning in Onitsha

From the findings of the study, there are a lot of urban planning problems in Onitsha can be examined as follows:

#### Ineffective land use planning and development control

Onitsha is found to have ineffective land use planning and development. This is as a result of proper development control and planning regulations by the town planning agencies. Developers built without proper approvals from the Town planning authority, hence sitting of buildings on major drainages, public open spaces resulting in urban decay. The city is filled up with unregulated, congested, ramshackle housing surrounded by indescribable filth. The findings of this study above are in tandem with the reports of Amujiri (2001). Besides, there is overpopulation in Onitsha looking for few decent houses in the inner city. As a result, there are wide spread of smart growths at the city peripherals. Also, most impending to the planning authorities is the non revision of the Onitsha master plan to reflect recent realities in the physical, social and economic development of the city.

#### Poor provision of basic services and environmental degradation

There are poor health facilities, inadequate drainage facilities and solid waste disposal facilities. Mountains of refuse are common features everywhere and they continue to creep increasingly into the limited road spaces with deteriorated urban infrastructure and basic social services in Onitsha. Obviously, the greatest of these problems facing Onitsha is that of erosion and waste management".

### Patterns of settlement

There is total neglect of physical planning in Onitsha. Rather, more attention is been given to sectorial and financial development planning without adequate infrastructure. This has led to disorderly spatial environmental development resulting in loose urban structure and life, uncontrolled urban growth and settlement pattern with a sense of urban lost. Also, the study reveals that it is difficult to rightly define the land use system in Onitsha. This is because virtually any available spaces have been converted into stores and markets.

#### Lack of involvement of operational agencies

Involvement of operational agencies in the development of Onitsha like Anambra State Urban Development Board (ASUDEB) and Ministry of Lands Survey and Urban Development (MLSUD) cannot be overemphasized. The study found out that most of development planning services was done by non indigenous planning consultants without integrating the *insitu* development agents like ASUDEB and MLSUD. The findings of this study is in line with the report of Green(1981) which states that development of urban plans, master plans, commercial and residential layouts and the likes, operational agencies have not been fully involved. The use of consultants and non- involvement of operational agencies poses serious problems to urban planning in Onitsha.

#### Lack of effective and functional transport system

The transport system of Onitsha is in a sorry state. One of the fundamental problems of Onitsha is lack of effective and functional transport system. The basic condition of the Onitsha urban transport chaos is of course, the deplorable condition of the roads. In the first place, road space has not increased commensurate with the post-civil war massive increase in the human and vehicular population of the city, even with its physical development and city expansion. Indeed, there is

inadequate supply of transport modes and services, incessant gridlocks on the major streets and interferences by street hawkers. This has led to increase in man-hour loss and trips, human and psychological cost of traffic congestion-frustration, anger and aggression, even all manners of respiratory and heart ill-health.

### **Inadequate qualified manpower**

Another major problem of urban planning in Onitsha is the inadequate qualified manpower to face the large planning and management responsibility confronting it. Urban planning activities need a well-qualified town planner, architect, surveyor, building inspector, drawing technicians, land valuation officers, site officers and a host of field officers. All these are inadequate in the offices of urban planning agencies in Onitsha. This is one of the reasons why professional monitoring and supervision of developments going in Onitsha become hectic to achieve by the planning authorities.

### **Political interference**

Urban planning in Onitsha usually encounters service problems as a result of political interference. This has resulted in politically motivated urban plans, layouts, buildings plans and construction of houses on unplanned locations as we can see from the cases of recent developments taking place in Fegge and 33. This has equally led to the distortion of the master plan, illegal conversion of government reserved areas to commercial or industrial areas which constitute security risks and adversely affect urban planning. For example, the area known today as "33" was once a game reserve in the master plan known as Akpaka Game Reserve. But today, Akpaka game reserve is unheard of, rather what we know today is a residential/ commercial area known as "33".

### **Problems of housing and living conditions**

Undoubtedly, poor housing conditions prevail in the majority of urban areas in Nigeria especially in Onitsha. Despite all efforts, there is still acute shortage of suitable and decent accommodation especially among the low income groups in Onitsha. This has posed a serious problem to urban planning. Surveys of housing conditions have indicated qualitative and quantitative deficiencies in residential accommodation in Onitsha and these has led to the increase of slums or shantytowns in Onitsha. An assessment of the slum conditions in Onitsha and environs is therefore imperative for devising appropriate strategies for addressing poverty reduction and to achieving sustainable urbanization in the planning area. whole buildings This study found that the households living in single rooms in Onitsha is 36% higher than the 32% average for the State as discovered by UN-HABITAT in 2009. Also, it was found that these single

rooms are lacking adequate housing facilities with deplorable environments. This can be simply described as toxic homes.

### **Crime and insecurity in the city**

High crime and insecurity becomes the order of the day in Onitsha.

Prevalence of miscreants, crime and juvenile delinquency, high population density, political violence, public ignorance and apathy are common and dominant in slums in Onitsha. Onitsha has become a very dangerous and unsafe city where disparate and lawless citizens abide. There incessant civil unrest.

### **Lack of public support**

The populace has lost confidence in the elected representatives and so many of them do not have a sense of responsibility to their environment or communities. Vandalism and destruction of government projects are quite pronounced in Onitsha, especially in the slums and shanties.

### **Issues of management and institutional framework**

Although the number and size of agencies responsible for generating polices and exerting powers in Nigerian cities have grown over the years, there has not been a corresponding improvement in the quality and quantity of urban services rendered.

### **Recommendations**

There should be a critical review of plausible strategies for prevention of urban planning and development problems. This can be attained by proper urban administration and management of urban land and functional land uses by the Town Planning Authorities. It would also include the provision of an efficient institutional framework that would manage the energy input and waste output and public education of urban residents on the advantages of safe and healthy environment.

Government must show the willingness and commitment to fight urban environmental problems as a prime remedial measure. An analysis of the problem indicates the failure of governmental institutions to adapt to social and economic changes, and deficiencies in governmental actions accounts for sustained deterioration of Onitsha.

Government failures are most pronounced include among others waste management, pollution control, promotion of health and safety standards, provision for housing development etc. The Government is therefore called upon to initiate through her numerous agencies

pro-active measures to remedy the situations.

Existing national policies on the environment should be implemented to effectively manage solid waste and industrial pollution.

Enforcement of Urban Land Use policies, Housing Policies and Planning Policies are advocated in this study in order to establish harmony and discourage dysfunctional land use patterns

One of the effects of uncontrollable growth is an overburdening of utilities, facilities and other public services. In response to such problems, the city can place a moratorium on further development until planning is completed; regulations are adopted and public facilities are expanded

The various organs of government, non-governmental organizations, public and private stakeholders must work harmoniously through a coordinating agency for effective management of environmental and security problems in Onitsha. The study recommends governments to work in partnership with these urban development actors to improve urban conditions.

Finally, the study is of the opinion that the government of Anambra State should endeavour to review and update the old master plan or produce new master plan for Onitsha to accommodate the city's growth.

## Conclusions

Onitsha have grown in an unmonitored and uncontrolled manner, which has led to the manifestation of various problems such as over-population, over-crowding, traffic congestion, environmental pollution, unemployment as well as the general deterioration of urban amenities, which have in turn precipitated various socio-economic, socio-cultural and sanitary problems in Onitsha. The awareness and need for a plan to manage the phenomenal growth and uneven development of Onitsha have become imperative. Furthermore, the existing system of local government has failed to provide efficient urban administration. Common services like drainage and refuse disposal have continued to suffer serious neglect often given rise to the ugly sight and considerable health and environmental hazards in Onitsha. Planning for specific projects are not coordinated and integrated to meet the demands of the fast-growing population now and in the future.

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