

Urbanization and Poverty in Ilorin

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Abstract

This study examines urbanization and poverty in Ilorin to explain the dynamics of urbanization and poverty in Nigerian cities that have received scanty scholarly attention. Though, studies on urbanization in Nigeria have suggest that urban poverty is a post-colonial development, nonetheless, it has become a social phenomenon, particularly in Ilorin with a high risk of poverty and homelessness, thus creating inequality among social groups and individuals. This paper using a qualitative research method of primary and secondary sources of data collection and interpretation reveals that urban poverty is a reflection of rural poverty in unemployment and poor infrastructure, resulting from exclusive, unsustainable social and economic policies that encourage rural-urban migration; while expectations for social and economic opportunities are inadequate and not feasible. It also revealed that urban problems, like poverty, are a societal problem that is more noticeable now in cities than in rural areas, more visible because of their spatial concentration in inner-city neighborhoods. The need to address urban drift and develop rural areas through adequate provision of social infrastructure would help create a sustainable environment and reduce poverty and rural emigration.

Keywords: Ilorin, Urban poverty, migration, colonial policies, economic condition and social inequality,

Introduction

Urbanization has remained a great challenge in Nigeria among other developing nations; it has impeded social infrastructural development and created a wide social gap among citizens. For instance, overcrowding and congestion, lack of affordable housing for the teaming members of the society, environmental degradation and constant population increase, including inadequate infrastructure and social and economic disparity has become a major challenge in the urban centres due to rapid increase in the population of cities (Bavel J, 2013, Bongaarts J, 2009: United Nations, 2008: Abubakar I. 2014). For instance, global estimates indicated that the population of urban centres has increased from 13% in 1900 to 30% in 1950. The report further estimated a rise in urban population to 65% by 2050. The astronomical growth in the urban population has been directly linked with rural-urban migration, that is, the search for economic and social values and benefits by individuals. The dimension and patterns of migration in Nigeria within the period was tremendous with rapid increase in cities of Lagos, Ilorin, Kano, Kaduna, and PortHarcourt among others, due to the impact of colonial administration and structure of government that makes such places attractive with social, economic, technological innovation and development. This paper therefore documents the challenges of urbanization in Ilorin, a phenomenon that has challenge national development, social equilibrium and inequality as a contribution to social history and humanistic studies.

Brief notes on Ilorin

Ilorin is presently the capital of Kwara state and the initial seat of the Ilorin Province that was part of Northern Nigeria during the colonial period. It became a state capital in 1967 with the creation of twelve

states by the Gowon led military administration. The population of the city according to colonial records was 36,343 in 1911 and it rose to 40,994 in 1953. The growth within the period resulted from the position of the city as the headquarters of the Province which the populace believed would offer greater benefits in terms of employment and social life. This also increased the population to 777,667 in 2006, thus becoming one of the most populous cities in Nigeria. The city has continued to witness spatial growth and expansion with an average of 25% (i.e., 2km) per annum. Nonetheless, there has been no corresponding or commensurable growth in the provision of social service and infrastructural amenities, while economic disparities have continued to widen. The result has been a decline in the quality of the environment and the quality of life of the populace, thus creating social and economic problems and crises for the inhabitants which this paper interrogates.

Literature review and clarification of the terms

It is necessary to state at this juncture that urbanization has attracted varying definitions in diverse ways; it has therefore generated a lot of controversies among scholars particularly in the social sciences. Thus, the general tendency among scholars has been to define the concept to suit their respective purposes. However, writings on the phenomenon of urbanization can be categorized into two major paradigms: The Evolutionist and the Political Economy perspectives. The former is from the functionalist or Positivist School and the latter from the Marxist School (Oyedele, 1987: 25-28; Castells, 1977:7-11). The Evolutionist perspective maintains that each social formation is produced without break by duplication of the element of the proceeding social formation. It asserts that forms of spatial settlements are the most visible expression of the changes taking place in society (Oyedele, 1987: 25). Fava (1968:32) defines urbanization as the process of total population concentration in urban settlement or else a rise in the population. Wirth (1938: 49), described “urbanism” which he used as a synonym for urbanization as “...a way of life”.

The main problem with these definitions is that they are evasive and simplistic because they seem not to provide any tangible meaning to the concept. Mabogunje, (1971:43-48) another celebrated scholar on urbanization in Nigeria, defines urbanization as “... a process which seeks through maximum specialization to increase the output of goods and services in a country subject only to the three conditions enumerated above...” The three conditions are the availability of surplus food; the role of the power group; and the presence of trade. Though Mabogunje’s work concentrates on the dynamics of the process, the main problem with his work is that his analysis is greatly influenced by a colonially derived perspective and model. This is because; he regards the process of urbanization in the West as the standard that other communities must conform to especially the Third World, without considering the peculiarity of their historical experiences. Although there are several works on urban studies, most of them fail to address the fundamental conceptual issue that the phenomenon raises. Even when they attempt to address it, it has often been evasive, simplistic, and tangential like those cited above.

It is a result of the theoretical and methodological deficiencies of the Evolutionist perspective that scholars like David Harvey, Manuel Castells, Enoch Oyedele, and others have examined the origin and nature of urbanization and the kind of society and social system that will produce and support it. These scholars have among other things, laid more emphasis on power and the subsequent allocation of resources between nations and between classes or its relations to the economy at the centre of their analysis. Harvey (1973:25) argues that the city and indeed urbanization process must be seen as a historical configuration reflecting the particular political and prevailing class relation in a historical epoch, that is, the communal, slaveholding, feudal capitalist, and Socialist social formations of Karl Marx categorization. Hence, this is regarded as the Political Economy Perspective. It maintains that each social formation produces its own urbanization (Oyedele, 1987:25). Thus, in applying this paradigm to the urban contradiction, Manuel Castells (1977:7) defines Urbanization as:

“... a process by which a significantly larger proportion of the population of a society is concentrated in a certain space, in which are constituted urban areas that are functionally and socially independent from an internal point of view and are in a relation of hierarchized articulation...”

Similarly, Oyedele (1987:16) defines urbanization from the political economy perspective as:

“... a continuing process of increasing functional or structural social differentiation and specialization in human society..., A social process involving people in social relationships within a new kind of physical environment. This process involves population agglomeration, increasing transformation of the economy from agriculture to a predominantly non-agricultural one, and a structural change in the form of settlement.”

These definitions cited above from the Marxist approach present a better understanding that the phenomenon of urbanization also involves power relations, because it focuses on the essential issues in the phenomenon, that is, the conflicts and contradictions between classes as located in the socio-economic organization of societies at different stages of the process.

In addition, Townsend (1979: 112-120) defines poverty as a “...lack of material resources of certain duration and to such an extent and possession of amenities and living conditions becomes impossible or very limited.” Olamajeye (1994) suggest that poverty is: “the degree of difficult encountered in making ends meet”. In the view of Oyedele (1987) the above definitions seem too simplistic because they are unable to fully describe the nature of poverty, particularly in contemporary urban centers. He noted that poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon, characterized by features of the poor (especially the urban poor) such as excessive labor flow, undifferentiated or unskilled persons who cannot readily be integrated into the production system, scarcity of essential commodities like food, housing, clothing etc; growth of slums unemployment and underemployment (Oyodele, 1987: 9-11)

Onibokun (1989:69-112) went further to defines urban poverty as: “Living in a sub-standard and sub-human environment plagued by slums, squalor and grossly inadequate social amenities such as health facilities, schools, recreational opportunities, etc. while Aluko (1975: 35) explains that poverty is “inadequate levels of consumption giving rise to insufficient food, clothing and shelter” Olomu and Akintola. (1995:125-140), in their view posited that poverty is “.... lack of an inadequate access to infrastructural among other things, while urban poor can easily be identified from the types of food they eat and the environment in which they live”. Botrus Botruss Ghali, provided a seemingly suitable remarks which provides the requisite multi-dimensional approach to the phenomenon poverty. According to him: “Poverty is manifested in many spheres of life: economically as deprivation, politically as molestation, sociologically as discrimination, culturally as ruthlessness and economically as vulnerability, and all these dimensions reinforces one another.” (1993 United Nation Organization Economic and Social Council Session)

From the foregoing, Poverty is a way of life that is characterized by low calorie intake, inaccessibility to adequate health facilities, lack of quality educational system, low life expectancy, high infant mortality, low income, unemployment and underemployment and inaccessibility to various housing and societal facilities. These can also be classified into two levels as absolute and relative poverty. Absolute poverty refers to the situation in which people barely exist, largely because their incomes fall below a level necessary to satisfy the basic necessities of life. Relative poverty on the other hand is used to describe as situation in which individuals are not poor in absolute terms, but have much less than others by way of income, properties and other resources (Aliyu, 2001; Abubakar, 2003; Abdulkadir, 2004; 2010). It is therefore much easier to recognize and describe poverty within Ilorin in absolute terms like any other Nigerian cities or urban centers.

Urban Poverty in Ilorin

Urban crises manifest in poverty, poor health facilities, poor transportation and communication systems, urban decay, poor housing, among others. These issues are threat to national progress and development. Thus, it is a major concern of policymakers, while efforts are always being made towards a total eradication of this phenomenon. However, despite all efforts by successive governments to eradicate poverty, the problem seems to be increasing on a daily basis in Nigeria. In the case of Ilorin under review, the causes of urban poverty could be categorized under the following broad headings: economic factors, political factors sociological factors, and the rapid and unchecked urbanization process.

Economic Factors

Generally, poverty is assumed to result from slow growth or total output per capital, this may be developed from a lack of adequate savings in the economy for investment or an inability to invest the available savings productively to generate an increase in physical assets that will lead to economic growth. Slow growth may also develop from the absence of technical progress or the slow pace of technological knowledge needed to raise the productivity of factors of production and transformations of the economy along the path of growth (Aluko, 1975:5-7). Generally, the economic situation in Ilorin does not favor growth because there is little or no industrial establishment, many of the industries established in the city in the early 1970's have packed up due to one problem or the other. A few functioning industries in the city now are, Global Nigeria Limited, Tuyil Pharmaceutical Industry Limited, the banking sector and a few small and medium-scale enterprises which are privately owned and they employ less than two percent of the available labor force in the city. These industries produce commodities like detergents, toilet soap, toothpaste, tea bags, pharmaceutical products, etc.

Other employers of labour in the city are foreign companies like John Holt Nigeria Limited, and Lever Brothers Nigeria Limited. CFAO, Peterson Zochonis (PZ), etc, these companies do not have their factories in Ilorin but use the city as a branch for the distribution of their products such as beverages, sweets, tea, etc. These companies also employ less than two percent of the city's workforce, while other inhabitants are either employed in the civil service or engaged in rudimentary jobs like weaving, pottery making, rope, mat making, and petty trading while some are engaged in services such as transportation, hotel and restaurant attendants. The fact is that there is no meaningful manufacturing industry in Ilorin, rather service industries are prevalent and this has made it very difficult for the city to generate wealth capable of bringing economic growth to the city. Also, the lack of business opportunities coupled with unemployment or poorly paid employment and lack of funds to provide healthcare has made poverty endemic in the city.

Another economic factor that has caused poverty in Ilorin is the unwillingness on the part of the people to move from jobs of low productivity to those of high productivity. The majority of the people are engaged in low-productivity, local industries like weaving, pottery marketing, bead making, dying, rope, and mat making. Those engaged in agriculture are on a subsistence level, while a substantial number of people are engaged in the services sector and petty trading. Thus, the unwillingness to move to, and in particular, the absence of highly productive manufacturing industries in the city is responsible for the low level of economic growth and development which therefore aggravates the poverty situation. The minimum wage law is another economic factor that has caused urban poverty in Ilorin. Although the law is meant to protect workers from exploitation by employers, this has led to a high rate of unemployment because the law has made some private employers in the city not employ those who would have otherwise been employed at a lower wage hence unemployment has become a general feature and this increases the degree of poverty of the people in the city.

Political Factors

The inadequacies in the act of governance through its policies have been identified as another major factor that has impacted negatively on urban dwellers and this borders on the poor perception of the needs of the people by the rulers. The inadequacies of inter-government relations, the lack of administrative capability of the rulers, and other factors have adversely affected the ability of most administrations to mobilize the needed resources like funds, skills, materials, etc. for good governance. It is observed that successive administrations in Ilorin have failed to give adequate attention to the plight of the urban dwellers especially in the allocation of resources to the social sectors. Government expenditures on health and education services have been dwindling every year. Similarly, most of the recurrent public expenditure of successive administrations in the state is absorbed by personnel costs, leaving little for essential inputs such as drugs and textbooks or maintenance of existing facilities and infrastructures that can stimulate investment.

Also, the state government depends so much on financial allocations from the Federal government rather than on Internally Generated Revenue (IGR). Despite the increased revenue from the Federal government in the past decades, this has not brought out any meaningful improvement in the provision

of social services because of a lack of control and guidance in government spending. This is more aggravated by the very limited participation of the people particularly the poor who form the bulk of the population, in the act of governance coupled with the great divergence that exists between the needs of the poor and what the urban managers perceived as their needs.

Other important political factors resulting from bad governance include: (i) Instability of government and institutions as agencies which were created and abolished at random by the state government. (ii) Unstable tenure of political and public officers, as political office holders, particularly at the local levels, are appointed and removed at will by the higher tiers of government, and since they are not sure of when their tenure will last, a lot of time is devoted in currying favor from and pleasing those who hold the reins of government at the higher levels and therefore pay scant attention to long term and sustainable program for the benefit of the people. Evidence from oral interviews indicates that it has been a situation of “making hay while the sun shines” by enriching themselves. There is therefore high level of corruption and a total lack of transparency in the act of governance in the state. (iii) Insensitivity and unresponsiveness by government to the needs and aspirations of the people in the city. (iv) Lack of proper and effective implementations of government policies. Experience has shown that good policies are very easy to articulate by government officials but implementation of such policies has always become impossible due to frustration from officials involved for personal gains

Sociological Factors

The somewhat deterministic cause of poverty in this perspective is the vicious cycle of poverty, where a person is poor because his or her parents were poor. The only solution to this is to break the cycle which implies that the offspring must move from the class of poor to a higher status. In the Third World, the vertical movement has proved very difficult; this is particularly the case in Ilorin where most of the poverty eradication programs have de-emphasized social welfare. Programs such as free education and health services and others have been replaced with cost-recovery programs and commercialization of Parastatals in providing infrastructural facilities. Oscar Lewis (1965: 213-215) identified many personality traits as comprising the culture of poverty. These traits have been summarized into four broad categories; these are:

- (i) The attitudes, values, and characters of the individual
- (ii) The nature of the family
- (iii) The nature of the local level organization beyond the family; and
- (iv) The relationship between the sub-culture and the larger society.

All the factors have important but largely negative effects on attempts to bring about change to such individuals and groups. It is noted that some aspects of the behaviors of the urban dwellers in Ilorin particularly in the slum settlements like Oloje, Pakata, Ita Kure, Adangba, Banni, Oke-Sunna, Okelele, Idi-Ape, Omoda and others areas in the inner-city core, as a result of the prevailing values and norms which they have internalized and so have become part of their personality traits. For instance, oral interview conducted reveals their belief that whatever work they inherited from their parents must be continued by the succeeding generation. This explains why the traditional industries like cloth weaving, pottery, dyeing, bead, rope, and mat making are still common in the city till present. This poverty has been endemic for quite some time, and this poverty-induced personality trait thus tends to be transmitted from generation to generation among some of the urban dwellers in Ilorin.

Another cause of urban poverty from a sociological perspective in Ilorin is related to the weight of family obligations and responsibilities resulting from the extended family system. The extended type of family system is very common among the urban dwellers in Ilorin especially those in the slum settlements. Investigation reveals that there are some households with as many as twenty-five members. In such households, the family head may be a subsistence farmer or a local cloth weaver, or even a messenger in an either public or private establishment and because of the poor or low level of income that characterized these jobs, the issue of survival with the large families becomes a great challenge, hence, people or households in this situation have continued to wallow in abject poverty.

The Factor of urbanization

The major factor tied to the phenomenon of urbanization as a cause of urban poverty is the inability or failure of urban managers to match the numerical growth of the city with the provision of the requisite infrastructural facilities. It has been noted that less than forty percent of all the physical developments in major urban centers in Nigeria are regulated and, in most cases, the regulation is carried out perfunctorily. Nigerian Cities are thus left to develop haphazardly, which therefore makes it uneasy or impossible to provide basic infrastructural facilities to the unplanned and unregulated sections of the city. (CASSAD, 1996: 58).

The critical argument in this approach is that Africa's development has been conditioned by the imposition of a capitalist mode of production on her economy. The dominant social formation and productive system in Africa as with other Third World countries have emerged a result of colonial capitalist development. Thus, the social and economic formations as well as the urban form in this part of the world have been conditioned by capitalist expansion. It is this argument that has led Manuel Castells (1977:40-48) to develop the concept of Dependent urbanization. Thus, urbanization in Nigeria as with other Third World countries is a "Dependent Urbanization". It is characterized by two stage occupational shift, that is, from agriculture to service sector which is contrary to the pattern in the Western nations where urbanization is characterized by a three-stage occupation shift, that is, from agriculture to manufacturing and to service sectors. Dependent urbanization is characterized by an urban population unrelated to the productive level of the system, an absence of a direct relation between industrial employment and urbanization. A strong imbalance in the urban network in favor of one predominating area increases the acceleration of the process of urbanization. A lack of jobs and services for the new urban masses and consequently a reinforcement of the ecological segregation of the social classes and a polarization of the system of stratification as far as consumption is concerned. The newly established cities reflected the new power structure and exercised functions relevant to the interest of Europe, thus, colonial cities lacked independent existence (Oyedele, 1987: 135-121)

It should be noted that with the establishment of colonial domination over Nigeria, new urban centers were created and the pre-colonial ones were incorporated into the capitalist social formation. Thus, all urban centers in the country became centers of colonial activities especially those that fell along the railway line were transformed to serve colonial interests. As a result of the geographical position of Ilorin (along the railway line), it became a Provincial headquarters which automatically led to the establishment of an administrative apparatus in the city. According to Hodking (1968:213-218), one unique feature of colonial cities was that they were essentially administrative centers and not centers of production of manufactured goods. As a result of colonial economic policies on land, labor, capital, and transportation, many people became migrant laborers which made them seek for employment in the colonial establishments. Thus, many people migrated from the countryside like Aboto, Ganmo Idofian, Omu-Aran, Osi, Ilofa, Amoyo, Erin-Ile, Offa, and other villages into Ilorin in search of better economic opportunities and social benefits. Unfortunately, because colonial cities were not centers of manufacturing, the migrants soon found out that these expectations were not realized due to the shrinking job opportunities of a depressed economy and overstretched social and infrastructure facilities. Since there were no industrial establishments to get the new immigrants employed they resorted to or fell back on service jobs while substantial numbers of the people continued to roam the streets. The most pathetic situation is that these unemployed immigrants find it difficult to return to their points of origin because they are used to an urban lifestyle. Consequently, they ended up living in poverty, slums and squatter settlements. This explains why from the colonial to the post-colonial periods, one often finds a lot of able-bodied men who are touts in motor parks, some are often seen idle under the trees during working hours of the day while a substantial number of them have also become professional beggars along the major streets of the city.

Conclusion

This paper explains the issue of urbanization and poverty in Ilorin as a development that needs urgent and detail attention of the policy makers generally and the government of Kwara state in particular. The paper noted the continued economic, social and political challenges as index for the population increase in the city, a continuation of the rural-urban migration style, patterns and structure of settlement in the

colonial period. It explained that urban poverty in Ilorin, as in other Nigerian cities, is sustained as a result of a lack of concrete policies directed at changing the post-colonial nature of the city from a dependent urbanization pattern.

The lack of good and able leadership that is committed to solving the problems of urban dwellers genuinely and the unrepresentative political system constitute a major cause of urban poverty in Ilorin. Therefore, as the rate of immigration into Ilorin continues, concrete measures should be put in place in terms of providing job opportunities to match the rate of rural-urban migration into the city of Ilorin.

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Oral interview/Informants

Mr. Abubakar Bello, 56years Zonal Education Controller, Kwara State Ministry of Education, interviewed in his office kwara State Government Secretariat on 10/7/2021

Mrs. Aduke Abdulrahma, 49years, Matron General Hospital Ilorin, interviewed in her office on 10/7/2012

Mrs. Adebayo Salawu, 50years, Director of Personnel Management, Kwara State Ministry of Works and Housing, interviewed in her office on 12/08/2021

Engineer James Amarin, 47years, Operation Manager, Powers Holding Company of Nigeria Plc. Kwara State Area Office, interviewed in his office on 12/08/2021

Mr. Abubakar Magaji 54years, Member, Ilorin Descendant Union (IDU), interviewed in his house-Omoda Area, Ilorin, on 15/08/2021

Mr. Abdul-Rasheed Alao, 69years, Retired Staff of University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital, interviewed in his house-Aselekun Compound, Adangba Area Ilorin on 15/05/2021.