



## **PUBLIC POLICY AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT PLANNING IN PORT HARCOURT CITY: IMPLICATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

**<sup>1</sup>Deinibiteim Monimah Harry, Ph.D. and <sup>2</sup>TPL. Douglas Sokeipirim Godstime**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Public Administration, School of Business and Administrative Studies, Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic, Rumuola, Port Harcourt

<sup>2</sup>Department of Urban and Regional Planning, School of Environmental Sciences, Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic, Rumuola, Port Harcourt

**Abstract :** The rapid increase in urban population in Port Harcourt City necessarily came with the massive expansion of the city. Available evidence shows that the newly developed areas of the city are not guided by the national urban development policy and any plan therefore, developments in these areas are unplanned and uncontrolled. Some of these areas are Choba, Omagwa, Eleme, Oyigbo, Aluu and Eneka. This paper is a discourse on the impact of non-adherence to public policy on urban development on environmental sustainability in Port Harcourt City. It identified the most recent urban development policies in the country to be the Nigerian urban and Regional Planning Policy (Act) of 1992 and the National Urban Development Policy 2006. The work reveals that the nonimplementation of urban development policy in Port Harcourt, especially in the new suburbs of the city has grave implications for environmental sustainability. Some of these consequences are flooding in various parts of the city at certain period of the year, serious traffic-jam and inadequate social amenities in the city. Thus the paper recommends that to achieve and/or enjoy environmental sustainability in Port Harcourt City the relevant State agencies, particularly the Ministry of Urban Development must redouble its efforts to ensure compliance with existing urban development policies and plans in the nation and state, among others.

**Keywords:** Public policy, Urban development, Environmental sustainability, Emission, Housing, Flooding.

### **Introduction**

The centrality of public policies in driving the development processes of a country need not be overemphasized. Public policies are government's courses of action or steps taken or laws enacted or declarative statements to enhance the socio-economic well-being of the people in a country. Public policies are multifaceted and multidimensional covering every sphere of human activities or endeavours. Hence, there are policies on education, health care, environment, etc. The national urban

development policy, 2006 and other urban and housing development before it are some of such public policies in Nigeria, aimed at achieving decent, planned and orderly urban/city development across the nation.

Port Harcourt City has been one of the rapidly growing urban centres in Nigeria since the early 1990s to date. The city has grown more than four times its size in the late 1980s, spreading to Choba, Omagwa, Eleme, Oyigbo, Aluu, Eneka and Igwuruta. However, apart from the original city (Town, Mile 1-3 Diobu, Old



GRA, Trans-Amadi, Ogbunabali, and D/line areas), the newly developed areas were not planned in line with the various urban development policies, especially the Nigerian Urban and Regional Planning Policy/Act No 88 of 1992 and the National Urban Development Policy of 2006. The non-implementation or non-enforcement of the national urban development policy had obviously resulted to the massive unplanned and uncontrolled development across the new suburbs of Port Harcourt. This has grave implications for environmental sustainability of the city. Thus, the main objective of this paper is to show that the nonadherence to the national urban development policy and the attendant unplanned and uncontrolled development in Port Harcourt have serious consequence for the environment. The paper argues that the reason for flooding at certain period of the year, serious traffic-jam and inadequate social amenities in the city is the unplanned and uncontrolled development experienced over the years. For Port Harcourt to achieve and/or enjoy environmental sustainability the relevant state agencies, particularly the Ministry of Urban Development must enforce strict adherence to the nation urban development policy.

### **The Concept of Public Policy**

Public policy is the generic term used to describe decisions and action plans of government. Essentially, in every state/society, governmental agencies enact laws make policies and allocate resources for the implementation or execution of such policies. These courses of action are with collectively described as public policy. Raipa (2002) sees it as a process of selecting strategies and making choices. To him, public policy making include some steps such as getting agenda, policy formulation, policy adoptions, policy implementation, etc. Generally, public policy is conceived as a system of laws, regulatory measures, courses of action, and funding priorities concerning a given issue or subject matter put in place by a governmental entity or its representatives (Kilpatrick, 2000). Similarly, Friedrich (1995) sees public policy as the proposed course of action of the government or one of its departments, agencies, or divisions. To Mlekwa (1976) it is the official statements determining the plan of action or what the government wants to do. The Business Dictionary (2018) defines public policy as the declared state objectives relating to the health, morals, education, housing, environment and well-being of the citizenry.

It is worthy of note that public policies are largely shaped by individuals and groups in a polity, especially in democratic nations. Hence, Kilpatrick (2000) posits that it is reasonable to assume that the process of public policy design or making always involves efforts by competing and conflicting interest groups attempting to influence policy makers in their favour. This equally means that, most often for a particular policy to be adopted by government sustained investigation, research, lobby by groups and advocacy are made to attain its successful acceptance. Obviously, public policy making and execution or enforcement is not a “tea party”.

### **Meaning of Urban/Urban Development**

An urban area describes a human settlement with high population density and infrastructure of built up environment. Urban areas are usually developed through urbanization and over time they assume different categorization such as cities, towns, suburbs, etc. Urban areas, most often are cosmopolitan, congregating people from different parts of the world. The United Nations Population Division, in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, observed that, in 2009, there were 3.42 billion people living in urban areas as against 3.41 billion people living in rural areas and since then the world has more people living in the urban areas than the rural areas. This means that for the first time the majority of the world’s population lived in cities (WHO, 2017). Furthermore, in 2014, the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economics and Social Affairs predicted that urban population would grow to 6.4 billion people by 2050, with 37 percent of that growth to come from three countries: China, India and Nigeria. This, no doubt, necessitated the need for urban development planning in many countries, including Nigeria. What is urban development planning?

According to Brooks (2017) large cities, towns and even small neighbourhoods do not spring up accidentally and overnight. Rather, they are products of careful planning by different professionals such as civil and design engineers, architects, environmental planners, surveyors, etc. Urban development is a system of residential expansion that creates cities. To Brooks the primary focus of urban development is residential areas. This is usually done to make adequate provisions for the ever increasing urban population. Urban development take the form of expansion into unpopulated areas and/or the renovation of decaying regions.



To achieve real urban development, urban planning is an imperative. Hall (1994) asserts that urban planning refers to planning with a spatial or geographical component in which the general objective is to provide for the spatial structure of activities or of land use which in some ways is better than the pattern existing without planning. “It is a technical and political process concerned with the development and design of land use and the built environment, including air, water, and the infrastructure passing in and out of urban areas, such as transportation, communication and distribution networks” (School of Urban Planning, 2018). Urban development planning deals with physical layout of human settlements and the primary concern is the public welfare in the areas of efficiency, sanitation, protection and use of the environment, as well as effects on social and economic activities (Taylor, 1998 and Midgley, 1999). Indeed, to attain the desired result in a well development urban centre development planning, urban development planning policy is a necessity.

#### **Public Policy and Urban Development in Nigeria**

As earlier noted, Nigeria is one of the countries with the fastest growing urban population, therefore, urban planning and development is a sine qua non in the nation. There have been different urban and regional development and planning policies in Nigeria from the colonial period to date, which among others include: the Cantonment Proclamation of 1904, which was made for segregation of Europeans reservation from the native areas, Ordinance No 9 of 1914, which was made to empower the government to acquire land for public use/reasons, the Nigerian Town and Country Planning Ordinance No 4 of 1946, which was to provide for the planning and implementation of schemes by Town Planning authorities, and the Nigeria Urban and Regional Planning Law No 88 of 1992. According to Bijimi (2016), the most recent of the urban development policy articulation was the formulation of the National Urban Development Policy in 2006. This was to tackle the rapid urban growth and the attendant high rate of uncontrolled and unplanned development in major cities across the country.

To Bijimi, in most cities in Nigeria, residents are faced with conditions of poor housing, poor infrastructure, increase growth rate of shanty towns, slums, and ghettos. This is in spite of the enormous human and material resources available in the country. As observed by Bijimi, the aim of the National Urban

Development Policy of 2006 was to achieve the development of a “dynamic system of urban settlement which will foster sustainable economic growth, promote efficient urban and regional development and ensure improved standard of living and well-being of Nigerians”. Also, the policy was suppose to address issues relating to access to land, urban transportation, urban environment, urban infrastructure, etc. However, these issues still remain problems of urban development in Nigeria. Indeed, urban development agencies in the country have not properly implemented the policies geared toward the establishment of modern cities in the nation that tackle the challenges of rapidly growing uncontrolled urban development in Nigeria.

#### **Urban Planning and Development: The Port Harcourt Experience**

The urban fabric of Port Harcourt metropolis has undergone dramatic change mainly during the last four decades. From a colonial city clearly delineated in its historic boundaries limited to the town, Mile 1-3 Diobu D/Line, Trans-Amadi, Ogbunabali and Old GRA axis, Port Harcourt has and continues to grow into the surrounding landscape, swallowing even more villages, coastlines, and previously unspoiled landscape, transforming into an ever increasing urban centre. During the last quarter of the twentieth century, Port Harcourt experienced tremendous structural transformation due to population and economic growth and development of its transportation and communication systems and the impact of globalization (Obinna, Owei and Okwakpam, 2010).

Like other cities in Nigeria, Port Harcourt has recorded rapid growth in population and aerial spread. From an estimated population of 500 in 1915 it grew to 30,200 in 1944. By 1963, its population was 179,563 and by 1973 it has reached 231,532 persons (Okoye, 1975 and Ogionwo, 1979). The Port Harcourt municipality’s population was given as 440,399 by the 1991 national census (Alagoa and Derefaka, 2001). The 2006 national census shows that the population is more than one million (Obinna, Owei and Mark, 2010). In terms of its physical size, the city grew from 15.54sq.km in 1914, to a metropolis covering an area of 360 sq. kilometers in the 1980s, and is still growing.

Port Harcourt, as a result of population increase and economic growth, spreads to the periphery as in the other metropolitan cities. However, this rapid urbanization is not guided by the



national urban development policy and regional planning, but with patchwork of little or no plans. This has caused negative effects on the urban environment, forests, fertile agricultural land and the cultural values are threatened. This kind of sprawling process creates a settlement pattern that increases the costs of infrastructure, traffic-jam (loss of man-hour), and inadequacy of social amenities. Indeed, residential development dynamics of Port Harcourt has been very rapid (Wizor, 2012).

Physically, the spread has occurred in both a south-easterly direction and a northerly direction. To the south, growth was through marshland colonization in squatter settlements locally called “waterfronts”. As Wizor (2012) has observed, in the last few years settlements of these waterfronts have been demolished by the Rivers State Government in its urban renewal drive. Growth has also occurred in north-westerly and north-easterly direction through the entrapment of indigenous enclaves of semi-rural and rural communities within the built-up areas of the city. The Port Harcourt urban fringe currently stretches to Iriebe, Eleme, Elelewon, Rukpoku, Woji, Choba, Rmuokwursi, Onne, etc (Wizor, 2012). Much of this growth is unplanned and unregulated (Owei, Ede, Obinna and Akarolo, 2008).

As part of its efforts to manage and infuse urban development planning to the city’s growth, the Rivers State Government in 2009 established the Greater Port Harcourt City Development Authority with jurisdiction covering Port Harcourt City and Obio/Akpor Local Government Area and parts of eight other local government areas. It covers an area of approximately 1,900 square kilometers (40,000 hectares of land) with a projected population of about two (2) million people (Gibb, 2009). Obviously, rapid urban development and increasing land use changes due to increasing population and economic growth is being witnessed in Port Harcourt and cities in other developing countries.

**Environmental Effects/Impact of Urbanization: The Port Harcourt Experience** The high influx of people into Port Harcourt necessitated the rapid expansion of the city in different directions. This expansion of the city has both positive and negative consequences. For instance, studies by De Sherbinin, Schiller and Pulsipher (2007) have shown that rapid urbanization has greatly accelerated economic and social development and global cities are engines of economic growth and centres of

innovation for the global economy and the hinterlands of their respective nations. It is for these benefits of urbanization the world continues to witness high rates of the phenomenon of urbanization especially in developing countries like Nigeria, which has an estimated 5.3 percent annual growth rate (Ohwo and Abotutu, 2015).

However, in spite of the benefits of urbanization noted above, there are negative effects of the phenomenon on the environment. As Ohwo and Abotutu (2015) have observed, “the goal of ensuring environmental sustainability is greatly threatened by urbanization, which has created several serious environmental problems”. The problems emanating from urbanization are even more grievous when the development of the urban area in question is not planned or poorly planned. Some of the environmental problems of urbanization are flooding, deforestation, pollution, slums and squatter settlements, traffic congestion, etc.

Commenting on the Port Harcourt experience, Baadom, Aselemi and Kpalap (2015) observed that urbanization has created numbers environmental issues in the city. For example, they noted with dismay the high level of growth of slums and squatters settlements in the urban fringes of Port Harcourt. Similarly, they noted that there is high level of noise, water and air pollution in the city due to uncoordinated growth of the fringes and unplanned settlements. In addition, there is drastic reduction of farm land, poor housing, bad drainage system causing flooding in many parts of the city. Furthermore, the city is experiencing poor sanitation, huge household and industrial waste generation, which were poorly managed resulting littering of garbage along major streets in most parts of the day. Lastly, Port Harcourt suffers from traffic congestion and high carbon emission from congested vehicles. All of these issues have grave consequences for the environment. Indeed, there is huge environmental degradation resulting from the rapid urbanization of Port Harcourt City.

**Unguided Urban Development: Implication for Environmental Sustainability**

The non-adherence to urban development planning has serious implications for environmental sustainability. To better understand these implications, it is important to know the meaning of environmental sustainability. According to Study.com (2018) environmental sustainability is defined as



responsible interaction with the environment to avoid depletion or degradation of natural resources and allow for long-term environmental quality. On the other hand, Financial Times conceived of environmental sustainability as a state in which the demands placed on the environment can be met without reducing its capacity to allow all people to live well, now and in the future. Still in this line of thought, Sustainable-friends (2017) posits that environmental sustainability is ensuring that in meeting our needs for water, food, shelter as well as engaging in activities that make our lives enjoyable and entertained, we do not cause damage to our environment or deplete resources that we cannot renew.

In other words, environmental sustainability is the utilization of the environment (land and all other resources) in the present without negative effects on the future generation in all ramifications. However, it is observed that the non-adherence to public policy guidelines on urban development, especially the National Urban Development Policy, 2006, which is aimed at addressing the rapid urban growth and the resultant high rate of uncontrolled and unplanned development in major cities, have negative and disastrous implications for the present and future generations of Port Harcourt residence. Some of the areas these effects are obvious or visible are discussed below:

First is the poor housing facilities developed in the city. Houses are developed without reasonable space in-between, greeneries (that is flowers and other plants to provide green vegetation) and in some cases built into the streets. These kinds of housing development have implications for environmental sustainability. For example, in most parts of the city there is no plants to absorb the carbon dioxide emitted into the atmosphere and this is dangerous to man and the environment. Essentially, the poor housing situation is associated with the many health conditions residents suffer.

Second, and closely related to poor housing, is poor refuse and sewage disposal systems. The resultant effect is unguided disposal of refuse and numerous septic tanks, with its attendant contaminating effects on ground water, especially in areas with high water table, since almost all the houses also sink their boreholes in the same environment. Third, and also related to the last two is the poor road connectivity and bad drainage system. The road situation is such that in most of the “new city areas” two vehicles cannot move in opposite direction at the same time

leading to serious traffic-jam for most part of the day resulting in heavy loss of man-hours. Similarly, the poor drainage system causes severe flooding, especially during the raining seasons. All these have catastrophic effects on environmental sustainability in the city.

Lastly, there is the issue of inadequacy of social amenities such as recreational facilities, schools, health care centres, electricity, etc. These facilities are difficult to provide in most suburbs of the city because of unguided property development without making the necessary provisions for them. Hence, public schools and health care institutions are grossly inadequate in most “newly developed” parts of the city.

#### **Conclusion**

Urban development planning is an instrument for the attainment of a well ordered and organized city, especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The non-adherence to the national urban development policy accounts for disorderly, unplanned and uncontrolled property/housing development in Port Harcourt. This pattern of urban development has grave implications for environmental sustainability. It is obvious that the Ministry of Urban Development as an agency of government responsible for guiding and controlling urban development in Port Harcourt is overwhelmed. Consequently, Port Harcourt city suffers from poor housing facilities, poor refuse and sewage disposal system, poor road connectivity and bad drainage system as well as inadequacy of social amenities. The conclusion of this paper is that for the city of Port Harcourt to enjoy or experience environmental sustainability national urban development policy should be strictly adhered to. The relevant state agencies, particularly the Ministry of Urban Development, must design and enforce the adherence to the urban development plan in Port Harcourt.

#### **Recommendations**

Following the above findings the study recommends that:

1. The Ministry of urban Development must re-double its efforts to ensure compliance with relevant urban development policies and plans in the state.
2. Garbage/waste disposal system should be developed to ensure proper disposal of household and industrial waste/garbage to drastically reduce environmental pollution in the city.



3. The state should construct a well-planned and designed drainage system to convey water to the different rivers in and around the city to avoid the annual flooding in some part of the city.

#### REFERENCES

- Alagoa, E.J.a and Derefaka, A.A. (2001) (ed) “The Land People of Rivers State (Eastern Niger Delta)” Port Harcourt: Onyeonia Research Publishers.
- Baadom, L.E., Aselemi, E.A. and Kpalap, E.M. (2015), Environmental Issues in the Urban Fringe of Port Harcourt, of Education Research, Vol. 1, No 1. Pp 42 – 53.
- Bijimi, C.K. A Review of the 2006 Urban Development Policy, @ nideas.wordpress.com
- Business Dictionary (2018), What is Public Policy?, hosted at [www.buinessdictionary.com](http://www.buinessdictionary.com)>difinition
- De Sherbinin, A. Schiller, A. and Pulsipher, A. (2007), The vulnerability of Global Cities to Climate Hazards, Environment and Urbanization, Vol. 19, pp 39 – 64.
- Financial Times (undated) Definition of Environmental sustainability, hosted @ lexicon.ft.com
- Friedrich C. (1975), “Political Decision Making, Public Policy and Planning” Ureges J. Jr. ed The Dimensions of Public Administration: Boston: Holbrook Press Inc.
- Gibb, O. (2009), Greater Port Harcourt City Development Plan: Government of the Rivers State, Port Harcourt.
- Hall, P. (1994), Urban and Regional Planning, London: Penguin Books.
- Kilpatrick, D.S. (2000), Definition of Public Policy and the Law, A paper presented at the National Violence Against Women Prevention Research Centre, Medical University of South Carolina.
- Mlekwa, V. (1976), “Policy and Practice in Adult Education: A District Case Study”, Utatiti Vol. 1 No. 2.
- Obinna, V.C. Owei, O.B. and Mark, I.O. (2010), Informal Settlements of Port Harcourt and Potentials for Planned City Expansion. In Environmental Research Journal, Vol. 4.
- Obinna, V.C. Owei, Okwakpan, I.O. (2010), Impacts of Urbanization on the indigenous Enclaves of Port Harcourt and Concomitant Policy Measure: In the Social Sciences, Vol 5 No. 3.
- Ogionwo, W.W. (1979), The city of Port Harcourt, Ibadan: Heinemann Publishers.
- Ohwo, O. and Abotutu, A. (2015), Environmental Impact of Urbanization in Nigeria, British Journal of Applied Science and Technology, Vol. 9, No 3, Pp 212 – 221
- Okoye, T.O. (1975), Port Harcourt, in G.E.K. Ofomata (ed) Nigeria Maps: Eastern Nigeria States. Benin City: Ethiope Publishing
- Owei, O. Ede, P.N., Obinna, F.C. and Akarolo, J. (2008), Land Market Distortions in Nigerian Cities and Urban Sprawl: The Case of Abuja and Port Harcourt, 44<sup>th</sup> ISOCARP Congress.
- Raipa, A. (2002), Public Policy and Public Administration: Development, Structure and Reciprocity, Public Administration Research Journal, Vol. 1 No. 1 pp 11 – 20.
- School of Urban Planning (2018), What is Urban Planning, McGill University, @ <https://mcgill.ca>
- Study.com (2018), Environmental Sustainability, hosted @ <https://study.com>



Sustainable Friends (2017), What is Environmental Sustainability and why is it important? Hosted @ [www.sustainablefriends.com](http://www.sustainablefriends.com)

Taylor, N. (1998), Urban planning Theory since 1945, Los Angeles: Sage

United Nations Population Division (2014), Urban and Rural Areas Department of Economic and Social Affairs – [www.un.org](http://www.un.org)

WHO (2017), What is Urban Development? at <https://bizfluent.com>

Wizor, C.H. (2014), Residential Development Dynamics in Port Harcourt Metropolis: Implication for Efficient Urban Planning, Journal of Environment and Earth Science, Vol 4, No. 6 Pp 78 – 85.