

## **An Appraisal Of Urban Renewal Projects In Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper focuses on an analysis of urban renewal projects in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The primary and focal point of this paper is to appraise the level of success of the urban renewal projects as it relates to the economic, social and physical context of sustainable development of Port Harcourt; and to examine the tools or techniques of urban renewal employed and the stages followed in the various processes. To achieve the stated objectives, the writer adopted the secondary survey method of data collection on the various aspects of urban renewal which includes land acquisition, relocation, rehabilitation, provision of public facilities, and re-sale. From the findings, it was vividly clear that a considerable number of urban renewal policies had been made and projects undertaken subsequently. These include Ndoki Waterfront Renewal Project, 1988; Marine Base Waterfront Renewal Project, 1989; Rainbow Town Renewal Project, 2000; and Abonnema Wharf and Njemanze Waterfronts Renewal Projects, 2009. It also showed that urban renewal programmes in Port Harcourt have operated below par because it had addressed only the physical aspect of the objectives of urban renewal without any rethink or consideration of the social and economic aspects. Furthermore, it showed the process had not been sustainable. The paper recommends the need for government and its agencies responsible for renewal projects to relocate the residents affected properly, seek to raise their income, adopt and allow for public participation, and institute a formal, efficient and effective renewal policy and legislative framework in order to have sustainable urban renewal programme in the State*

## **Introduction**

Policies are statements of intent of what government has to do and would do. Churning out policies for implementation had been the position of successive governments in Nigeria. Unfortunately, a massive chunk of these policies do not see the light of day. They could not fulfill or accomplish their purpose owing to lack of implementation or as it were poor implementation and sometimes the unacceptability of the projects by the public or the supposed benefactors of such lofty government projects, worse still could be detour of the main focus of the policy by the outright deprivation of the intended population or masses from enjoying the provisions and turning it over to the bourgeois class at the detriment of the poor masses. Urban renewal on the other hand, is one such statements and projects that are undertaken by governments. The need for renewal arises as a function of the decay of urban infrastructure facilities and amenities. Notably, Urban settlements or as it were cities' physical structures and their environs depreciate with use over time. As cities grow, certain generic issues become imminent. Social issues or problems like population growth, density explosion as well as unemployment which deepens poverty will impact on the environment and physical structures thereby increasing the rate of deterioration.

The decay would be seen in inadequate and substandard housing provision, poor housing condition (congestion in housing and occupancy rate), poor and improper sanitation, lack or inadequate social facilities provision, poor and unpleasant environmental condition, squalid neighbourhoods with broken sewers and dilapidated drainages, and increased social malady (crime). This decaying condition is most often observed at the inner core of the city, in older neighbourhoods or at the periphery of the city. It is referred to as slum. It also develops as a makeshift settlement within the city and outgrowth of it and it impacts negatively on the urban system and components which includes the urban space. In a bid to combat this phenomenon, renewal and/or reshaping, restructuring and reconstruction of the parts of the city has been recommended to forestall its occurrence, and further growth. Urban renewal policy and projects in Port Harcourt which had been on the front burner of state governments over the years had been justified by poor planning, the tear and wear of facilities and other symptoms of blight. It had taken the form of the demolition/slum clearance in parts of Port Harcourt City which were aimed at improving the housing condition of residents. A catalogue of this would include the Ndoki Water Front demolition exercise of 1988, the Marine Base Water Front demolition exercise of 1989, the Rainbow Town Urban Renewal Scheme, the Njemanze and Abonnema Wharf, demolition exercise of 2016, and the pending demolition of Bundu Water Front.

Given a catalogue of the various renewal programmes undertaken previously in parts of Port Harcourt, this paper seeks an analysis of one of these projects, taking into consideration the implementation, the techniques of urban renewal employed and how the people, and the environment affected had fared before, during and after, the context within which it was or has been carried out, the site history and characteristics, the socio-economic characteristics of the people, and how much of the objectives of the policy has been met by these projects. This analysis was driven majorly by secondary data obtained

through qualitative analysis of academic journals, publications, archival materials and professional websites.

### **Statement of problem**

One of the characteristics of urban sustainability is the satisfaction of basic human needs (Jacobs, 1991), which includes shelter. The Rivers State urban renewal policy and projects is a tool that has been employed in solving the problem of poor environmental quality and poor housing conditions in order to achieve sustainable housing within the state. However, the outcome of this process has not been comprehensive and all inclusive. To this end, the question remains, how well has this renewal policy and projects been implemented bearing in mind its objectives?

### **The study area**

Rainbow Town is located in the heart of Port Harcourt City at the Trans-Amadi Industrial Layout. The area covered by the housing units is about 23.24 hectares (The Vanguard, 2014). Rainbow Town is a part of Port Harcourt City with relatively flat or undulating lowland type topography measuring about 3.3m above sea level, with a characteristic poor drainage condition (Mmom& Fred-Nwagwu, 2013). Historically, the site was originally an area of land allocated and designed by the then Eastern Regional Government for housing mostly for the low-income earners. The design was such that the roofs and buildings were made of multi-colours like a rainbow, hence the name coinage “Rainbow Town”. During the Nigerian civil war, it was taken over by the military first and foremost as a military garrison and secondly to forestall the rising inter-ethnic conflict the area was generating between the Okrika and the Ikwerres. The later took over the housing units and like the characteristic military behaviour messed up the housing units and the surroundings and it turned into a slum. During the second republic, the Rivers State Government under the leadership of Chief Melford Okilo built the Bori Camp Barracks and relocated the military. However, no significant effort was made to revitalise the site. It was later inhabited by poor migrants to whom the military sublet the housing units.

### **Conceptual framework/ literature review**

#### **Urban renewal**

Urban renewal as traced from the literature all began in Europe and America where dilapidated structures and slum areas were cleared and replaced with subsidized housing for the public (Enger and Smith, 2004). Urban renewal as defined by Greber (1965) is a “deliberate effort to change the urban environment through planned large-scale adjustment of existing city areas to meet present and future requirements for urban living and working”. Osuide (2004) viewed urban renewal as a planned attempt geared towards the transformation of an urban environment via structured large-scale control of existing urban areas so as to enhance the present and future operations of urban populace. Furthermore, urban renewal could as it were be described to involve the physical redevelopment of physically degenerate areas of urban settlements, the upgrading of local or neighbourhood infrastructure and utilities, the termination of all forms of undesirable organisations and the creation of new or additional jobs (Zielenbach& Levin, 2000).

From the foregoing, the focus and consideration of urban renewal efforts is therefore geared towards rebuilding and rehabilitating of old and worn-out areas of town and subsidizing the rental and purchasing cost of the rebuilt properties.

Also embedded in its scheme include the provision of jobs and the promotion of the socio-economic wellbeing of the city and its residence. Furthermore, the urban renewal process involves a blend of government effort and that of the community/neighbourhood land and property owners for its success. According to Greer (1965) as cited in (Eni & Abua, 2014), urban renewal is also described as the totality of all public and private actions carried out or undertaken in order to give an urban area or portions of it the required upgrade and rehabilitation. Greer (1965) also described urban renewal as the renewing of the decayed parts of an urban centre with the co-operation of the residents of the area of town intended for the renewal project. As such, it requires a deliberate but collaborative effort of the stakeholders on all fronts. However, it relies greatly on government in the exercise of legislative authority or power of eminent domain (Eni, 2006). Urban renewal is a total and an all-encompassing neighbourhood re-development effort aimed at revitalizing and upgrading the physical structure of a particular section of the city in order to raise the aesthetic quality and living standard of the urban area (Eni & Abua, 2014).

### **Objective of urban renewal**

The main objective of urban renewal is to better and improve the quality of life of residents of urban areas (Eni & Abua, 2014). Shuaeeb, (2013) holds that “the goal of urban renewal was to ensure an improvement in urban living standard as part of a strategy to boost the economy both locally and internationally”. Urban renewal could be viewed as a long-term development that touches on all aspects of the social, economic, physical and environmental condition of an urban area (Roberts, 2000). This probably informs why recently urban renewal programmes should be driven by sustainable built environment practice. Urban blight and squalid neighbourhoods is a challenge – a public challenge caused by poverty. So urban renewal is a strategy aimed at achieving balanced economic, social and physical change.

### **Stages of urban renewal**

The various stages of urban renewal as put by Northam (1979) cited in Eni & Abua (2014) include six successive stages. They include : (i) a workable programme

(ii) Land acquisition (iii) relocation

(iv) Demolition (v) provision of public facilities, and (vi) re-sale.

The stages follow this order or sequence: Workable programme (policy) – land acquisition – relocation – demolition – provision of public facilities – re sale. However, the enumerated stages appear to be for the redevelopment or total clearance strategy only.

### **Benefits of urban renewal**

The benefits of a sustainable urban renewal project cannot be overemphasized. The benefit as outlined below is as contained in the effort of Shuaeeb (2013).

### **1. Urban transformation**

Every successful urban renewal project ever undertaken the world over, regardless of the method of renewal applied had always brought about some good level of socio-economic and infrastructural transformation within the urban fabric, thereby lowering the gap that previously existed between infrastructure systems and the populace.

### **2. Improved environmental air quality**

Air quality tells of the sanitary and sustainable state of a built environment in terms of adequate open air space management, reduced urban heat, and reduced environmental (air, land and noise) pollution. Urban renewal is a tool or policy instrument that is designed and adopted to achieve such conditions and as it were, improve the health, social welfare and environmental condition of the built environment.

### **3. Resilience for climate change effect**

In order to forestall excessive heat and other unsavoury environmental conditions caused by alterations in the natural albedo of the lower atmosphere that houses humans, other living organisms and plants, it behoves urban government and professionals in the built environment to resort to sustainable physical planning efforts and decision-making processes, that integrate sustainable design and environmental friendliness. This obviously can be achieved via the implementation of urban renewal plans especially by upgrade of physically degraded areas (slums) and low-lying coastal areas.

### **4. Enhance socio-economic practice**

Urban renewal in whatever form applied or strategy adopted has been noted the world over to drive the economy of its area of implementation. This is because it has always brought about a regeneration of the built environment and thereby creating an economy of scale enhancing socio-economic activities that meet demands of the urban place.

### **5. Promote/creation of job opportunities**

Upon an effective implementation of an urban renewal initiative, different kinds of job opportunities are created. These job opportunities avail themselves in the form of urban designs, architectural designs; environmental technology, artisanship and other specialized disciplines.

### **6. Improved professional practice:**

Successive and sustainable urban renewal practice will enhance increased knowledge on urban planning practice and thereby promote increased acceptance of the professionals by the populace. This will in turn deepen interest towards sustainable urban planning and design and hence increase professional practice in Nigeria.

### **Urban Renewal Techniques**

There are three main urban renewal strategies that have been employed, and a fourth proposed from the sociological school of thought. The application of any of the three main approaches is dependent on the condition of decay or blight.

### **1. Redevelopment or Total Clearance**

This involves total or complete demolition of an entire area and redesigning and rebuilding of structures. This is adopted when there is absolute decay of an entire urban neighbourhood or district.

### **2. Rehabilitation and renovation**

This has to do with the repairs, upgrading of defected structures, and improvement in the provision of facilities and amenities. It is employed when there are a few blighted conditions in a neighbourhood.

### **3. Conservation or preservation**

This technique involves setting standards for building construction and design (building codes) for the people and zoning regulations and enforcing it through awareness campaigns and enlightenment. The purpose of this is to preserve and prevent decay of areas of town.

### **4. Economic Revitalization**

This is hinged on the idea that if all the people have good jobs and other economic opportunities they would ordinarily keep their environment and its structures in good condition. So it is a matter of create jobs for all, eradicate poverty and you preserve the town from blight and decay.

### **5. Housing policy**

A policy is a statement of intent made by a government or an organisation clearly indicating stipulated procedures for solving identified problems (Sulyman, 2000). The housing policy is an urban planning tool employed with the sole aim of solving problems of housing, so as to achieve sustainable housing. For a housing policy to be viable, it should identify the problem areas of housing within its coverage area and should be laden with the best prescribed and sustainable procedure that meet present and predicted future housing need. Secondly, it should have the specific goal of providing and making available decent and affordable housing for all (Ibimilua & Ibitoye, 2015). Furthermore, a housing policy should be proactive and nonetheless comprehensive by stipulating roles to the different stakeholders including that of government which may range from the planning and control of housing production processes which include –investment, acquisition of land, construction, occupancy, etc. - to intervention which is required to proffer solutions to specific problems that involve land use plans and controls, credit and financial aids, subsidies intended for low income groups, rent control, slum clearance as well as relocation (Lawal, 1997:139).

### **Overview of the provisions of the Nigerian national housing policy**

Ibimilua & Ibitoye (2015) in their work outlined the various provisions and considerations of the Nigerian housing policy with a concentration on the vital issues. These issues have to do with, access to land, urban and rural housing, prototype housing designs, affordable

housing cost, housing provision with the use of local building materials (with a consideration of the local climate and culture).

Other vital considerations identified include infrastructure provision, housing and infrastructure maintenance and repairs, building materials (especially local ones), health, finance, cooperative, and the periodic review of the policy.

The Nigerian national housing policy made provisions for:

- 1) Access to loans and subsidies for the purposes of research in housing, housing construction and delivery from the Federal Mortgage Bank.
- 2) Tax exemptions on mortgaged loans and subsidies granted for residential buildings.
- 3) Access to infrastructural utilities and services such as potable water, power (electricity) supply, good communication, and transport services.
- 4) Government agencies and non-governmental organizations involvement in the provision and delivery of housing including community-based organizations.
- 5) The use of local building materials.

### Methodology and data

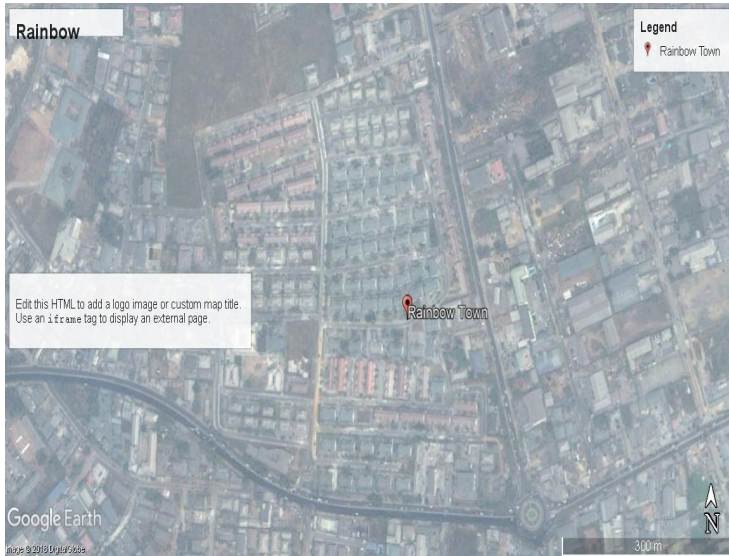
Primary and secondary data were utilized in this work. However, the most adopted data input for this study were satellite images of the study area with its surrounding area, remotely sensed with different resolutions at different times adapted from Google Earth, which covered the study area and its environs. The three images used for the study are the Google Earth images of 2000 and 2018. Other photographs were also acquired to buttress the affirmations of this paper.

### Discussions

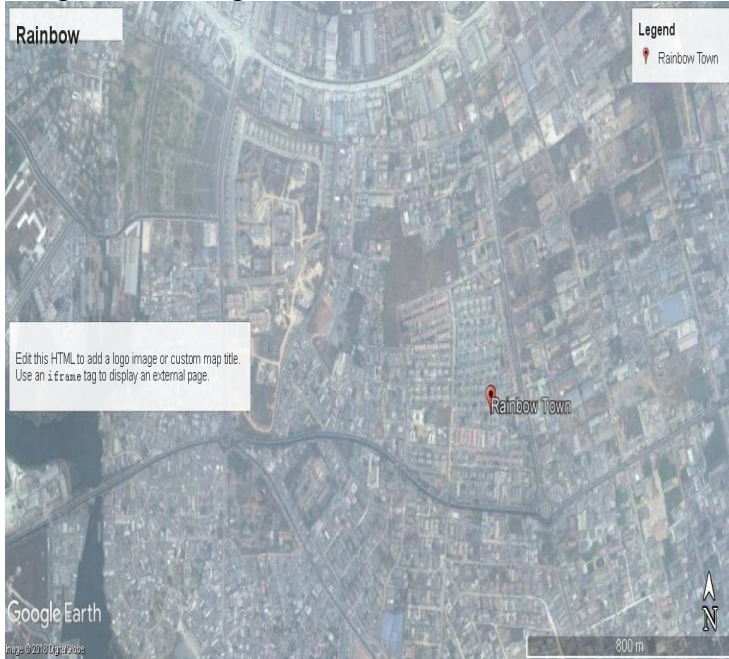
In order to examine residential development dynamics of Rainbow Town in Port Harcourt, two Google Earth images of December 2000 and January 2018 were acquired. Other photographs were also acquired to depict the present condition and housing type provided.



Google Earth Image of Rainbow Town after Demolition December, 2000



Google Earth Image of Rainbow Town Estate after Construction, 01/2018



Google Earth Image of Rainbow Town Estate after Construction, 01/2018



Sources: Google Map.

The red circle shows Rainbow Town Area after demolition

### **Rainbow Town Socio - economic profile and physical environment condition**

Rainbow Town prior to 2007 was really a stigma for those living in the area with all manner of proliferations in the environment and a whiff of decay. There was also a total lack of security as crime inevitably reigned. The site revealed a measurable degree of decay in social, environmental and housing condition as displayed by the poor sanitary and health conditions sighted in the study area. It was really an overcrowded Squatter settlement inhabited by poor urban dwellers. The houses were made of plywood and zinc with interment block houses competing for space. The buildings have reached advanced stages of blight and decay with an obnoxious dirty environment.

### **Background of rainbow town demolition policy**

Rainbow Town like every other poorly developed low-income shanty residential neighborhood within the Port Harcourt City metropolis was underserved in terms of infrastructure and basic amenities. The physical environment was quite unsightly with broken drains infested by rodents and reptiles, scattered all over with characteristic dwarf shanty dwellings closely knitted to each other, surrounded by mud water ditches and other debris. The demolition policy of Rainbow Town was premised on the above reason as well as the incidences of criminal activities that often ravage the settlement and for which it was known for.

Rainbow Town was notorious for serving as hideout for criminals. It was regarded as the depot for illicit drug parade and trafficking. Emphatically, the Government of Rivers State made the pronouncement and implemented same in December, 2000. For the State government, this was its way of curtailing and eliminating criminal activities in the city as well as battling insecurity within the environ. Residents were forcefully evicted with no prior arrangement or relocation plan.

### **Justification for eviction and demolition of rainbow town – July 2000**

The Rivers State Government stated that crime, land conflicts, and purported illegal occupation were the reasons that justified the forceful eviction and demolition, and that the evictions would allow for urban renewal.

### **Vision and policy objective for rebuilding rainbow town**

The vision statement eulogized middle-income and high-income private modern housing units. This development did not commence for about a period 7 – 8 years after the residents were evicted and the site cleared.

The demolition and planned redevelopment of Rainbow Town was to turn the land area of Rainbow Town a sustainable residential settlement annexing the Port Harcourt industrial estate in Trans-Amadi(Leadership Magazine, Aug. 14, 2014).

### **Building types available in the estate**

The development contains the following building types:

- **Thirteen 5-Bedroom Detached Houses**



### **Detached Houses**

Source: estateintel.com

- **Fifty 4-Bedroom Terraces**



### **Terrace Houses**

Source: estateintel.com

#### ➤ **Iconic Tower**

A 15-storey tower which is designed to serve as the hub of commercial activities comprising of a conference centre, group of offices, a cinema, shopping area, restaurants and bar, motel, and of course a helipad.

#### ➤ **City Block Towers**

Sixteen 12-storey Towers with 80 units. Each with 3 bedroom apartments and penthouses. These towers are spread out in groups of 2.



### **Towers**

Source: estateintel.com

#### ➤ **Point Block Towers**

Nine 15-storey Towers with 52 units. Each with 2-3 bedroom apartments and Penthouses.



### **Point Block towers**

Source: estateintel.com

All the detached houses and terraces were completed in 2015 and the first Point Block Tower, pictured above was delivered in 2016. Most of the ongoing construction is focused on the completion of this Tower as construction on the others including the Iconic Tower have slowed down or halted altogether.

The Rainbow World vision began in the year 2008. It was conceived to be an attractive and a safe haven for those seeking greener pasture to invest.



Aerial/birds eye view of rainbow town estate

### **Rainbow town renewal project, 2000**

#### Characteristics

Overcrowded Squatter settlement inhabited by poor urban dwellers. The houses are made of plywood and zinc with interment block houses competing for space. The buildings have reached advance stages of blight and decay with an obnoxious dirty environment.

Urban Renewal Approach Employed – Total Clearance Analysis –

- i. Number of building units before demolition – not known
- ii. Number of building units after demolition/rebuilding – 1,181
- iii. There was no resettlement plan
- iv. Rebuilding began about eight years or more after actual demolition.

#### **Summary of analysis**

- i. The project like every other renewal project in Port Harcourt failed partly due to lack of coherence and the absence of effective communication on the part of the government, other stakeholders and the original landowners. For instance, majority of the people do not grasp the importance of the exercise and what it holds for them. As such they need the prerequisite enlightenment. Moreover, they see it as government sending them back to villages and so would resist it.
- ii. The rejuvenation project had no plan for the re-settlement of the affected residents as it has in similar ones.
- iii. When one slum is cleared thus and people are not properly relocated but allowed to just go scam for housing, another slum emerges elsewhere in the city. This is because they go to another neighbourhood or to different neighbourhoods to seek the kind of shelter they could afford which is another set of shanty structures.
- iv. The residents of the affected area usually are exposed to the risks associated with flooding during rainfalls because of the absence of a good drainage system, and urban heat caused by the close knitting state of buildings.

- v. Increased number of prostitutes, increased level of insecurity and crime rate, poverty and deteriorated socioeconomic condition of urban dwellers had been characteristic aftermath of the various urban renewals in Port Harcourt.

### **Conclusion**

From the analysis, it is crystal clear that all urban renewal programmes lack the social and economic aspects of sustainable urban renewal. It has also revealed that the environmental quality within the areas where renewal had been undertaken in Port Harcourt had been enhanced. However, its overall impact and effect it should have had on the city dwellers is far from being actualized. This is due to the fact that the projects implementation processes and the modus operandi had not been enhanced having remained lopsided without incorporating other aspects of the ideology. As a result, the urban renewal projects are only viewed as one of the projects of government aimed at reclaiming land for government functionaries. From the foregoing, one would seemingly conclude that urban renewal projects carried out in Port Harcourt had had no significant impact on the quality of life of the slum dwellers in Port Harcourt. Thus, the Government needs to reappraise its urban renewal efforts and make amends where necessary in subsequent programmes of the sort.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the foregoing discourse and analysis, the following recommendations had therefore been highlighted for an effective and effectual renewal project that would be socio-economically viable and environmentally sustainable:

1. Government to prioritize poverty alleviation via a reduction in unemployment and a raise in income as a main objective of Effective urban renewal projects.
2. Public participation should be employed where residents and other stakeholders are allowed to give their input in the process. They should also be empowered to get subsidies and loans to acquire land after demolition or as it were renovating their buildings where the rehabilitation strategy is employed.
3. The State Government via its agencies such as the Development Control Department in the ministry of Urban Development should discourage the growth of squatters and slums in urban areas rather than resort to demolition exercises.
4. The State Government as the major stakeholder should endeavour to set up an effective legal framework that would support the physical planning, the control of development and grant access to physical development funds among other things.
5. All professionals in the built environment and other stakeholders inclusive should set up, encourage and coordinate collaboration between themselves and members of the public sensitizing them regularly on the need and benefits of physical planning and its various tools of effective socioeconomic development in Nigeria.

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