



Lagos Urban Planning: **Debunking Myths & Stereotypes**

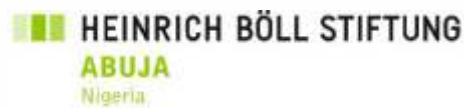
All around the world, what constitutes a livable city is constantly in flux, usually following new cultural, social or technological trends and discoveries. Our engagement with people on new ways of thinking about Lagos made one thing clear: government, civil society and the public had been in thrall to decades-old myths and stereotypes. Generally, it has been convenient to lay the blame for urban dysfunction on certain, usually disadvantaged groups of people within society, leading to a mismatch between the solutions proffered and the real problems. The result is that those solutions have consistently failed.

This small booklet offers a selection of such stereotypes, all debunked by writers reflecting on alternative city-making opportunities as we drive towards more inclusiveness and climate resilience.

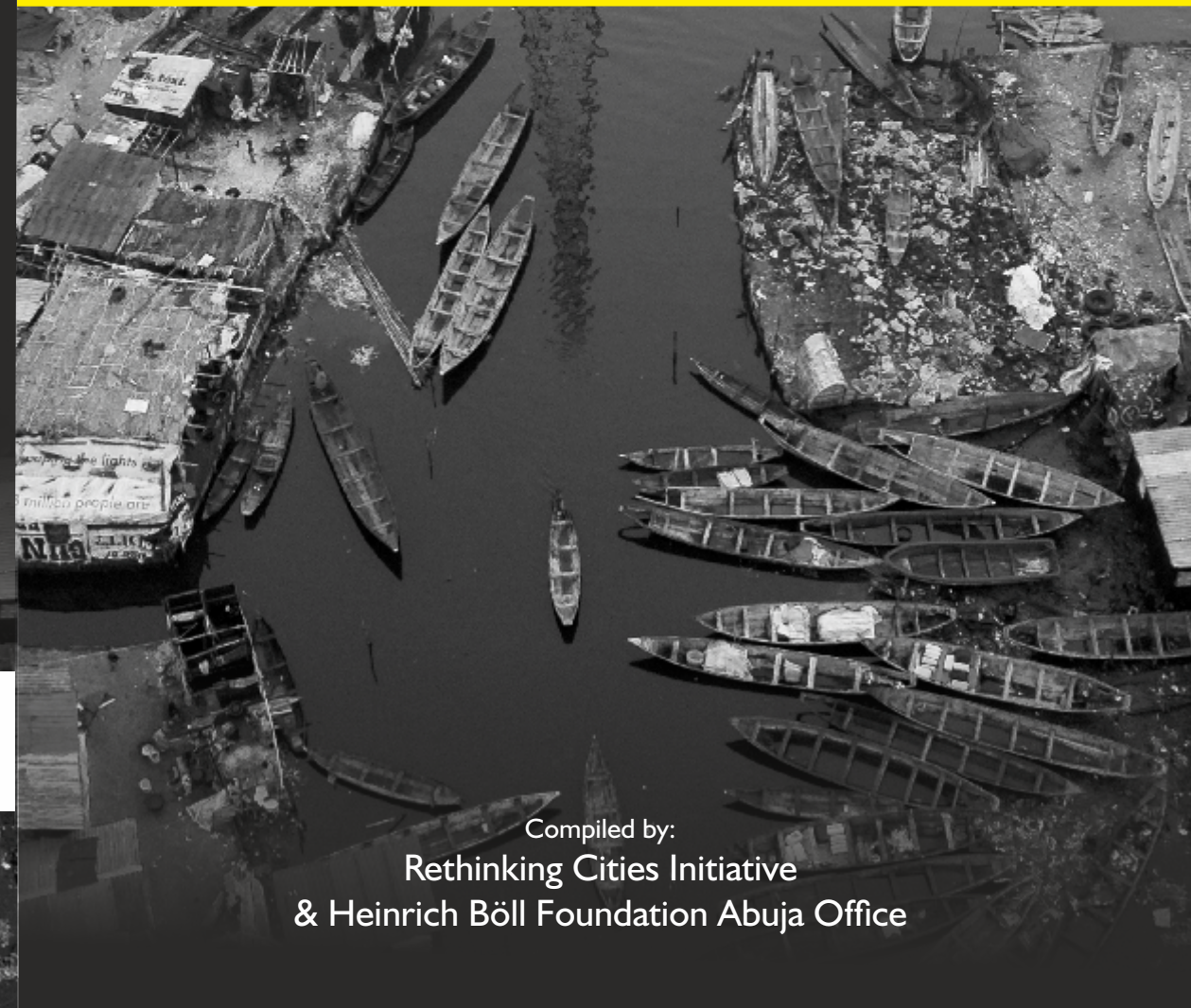
Reflect and join the conversation #RethinkingLagos

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Compiled by:
Rethinking Cities Initiative
& Heinrich Böll Foundation Abuja Office

An aerial black and white photograph of a waterfront area in Lagos, Nigeria. The water is filled with numerous small, traditional wooden boats (dugout canoes). Along the shore, there are various makeshift structures, some with corrugated metal roofs. One prominent structure has a sign that reads "Keeping the lights on for 3 million people are". Another sign on a boat says "NIG". The overall scene depicts a busy, informal urban environment.

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Foreword

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Our Vision of Lagos

Lagos is a city driven by its biggest resource – the people with their enterprise, creativity, determination and their intelligence to negotiate urban space in the most efficient ways. Their self-organizational strategies are refined by a government which learns from the local processes and systems, integrates them into her institutions and policies; and supports her citizens by constantly improving service delivery for their well-being and peaceful co-existence.

The complex interactions in the city are managed in such a way that everybody's needs and rights are respected at any given time and everybody can live without fear or oppression. The city will proudly define itself through its cultural heritage and history, the socio-economic diversity and potentials of its residents as well as its local biodiversity and green spaces.

About The Contributors

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Rebecca Roberts is a Ph.D. candidate examining the intersectionalities between internal displacement, migration, and urbanization. She has a decade of experience in implementing and managing development projects across 23 states in Nigeria. Her sectoral experience spans community organization, support and engagements, community public health, public education, and human rights, informality (livelihood and housing), urbanization, internal displacement, forced migration, youth development, public policy analysis, advocacy, project monitoring, and evaluation.

Olajumoke Akiode is a policy researcher and consultant, with expertise in applied ethics, gender equality and social inclusion (gesi), monitoring and evaluation, public-private infrastructure partnership advisory, stakeholder management and 'ontologized' sustainability. A passionate advocate of sustainable development, women empowerment, good governance and anti-corruption initiative.

Temilade Sesan is a development sociologist with research and consulting expertise in the areas of gender, energy and the environment. She works across sectors to identify pathways to greater inclusion of marginalised groups – including women and girls – in public and private development initiatives. Her work highlights the social and cultural upheavals that often accompany seemingly benign processes of technological and economic advancement in developing-country contexts.

Kofo Adeleke is a development consultant. She has an M.Sc in Social Policy and Social Administration from the London School of Economics and Political Science and a Certificate in Sustainable Environmental Management from the University of California Berkeley, and is a Beahrs ELP alumni. For the past 20 years she has developed and coordinated a wide spectrum of environmental programmes and resource materials focused on natural resource management.

Victoria Ibezim-Ohaeri is the founder and director of research and policy at Spaces for Change [S4C], a non-profit organization based in Nigeria that conducts cutting-edge research and advocacy focusing on strategic sectors such as urban governance, gender inclusion, energy policy and defending the civic space. She is an SXSW 2013 honoree, 2016 Desmond Tutu Fellow and 2015 Harvard University alumni.

Lookman Oshodi is a Commonwealth Professional Fellow is the Project Director of Arctic Infrastructure (AI), a multi-disciplinary private organization with a broad focus on infrastructure delivery, urban development and the environment. Lookman Oshodi is an infrastructure, urban development and city system strategist.

Taibat Lawanson is an Associate Professor of Urban Planning at the University of Lagos, Nigeria, where she leads the Pro-poor development research cluster and serves as co-director at the Centre for Housing and Sustainable Development. Her research is in the broad areas of urban informality, environmental justice and pro-poor development. She is interested in how formal and informal systems can synthesize in African urban contexts.

Malaika Toyo is the Principal Director of Made Culture where she works with a team of technical experts to facilitate high-level conversations between cross-sector actors to deliver projects that address Africa's most pressing problems. Her keen focus is on co-design methodologies, adaptive learning and evidence building.

Segun Ogunleye is a development practitioner with close to 13 years of experience. His experience cuts across urban development planning, climate change, regional economic development and migration. His areas of expertise include governance and social inclusion of vulnerable and marginalised groups. He is happily married and loves cooking, traveling and reading.

Amamchukwu OkaforAmam holds a master's degree in Economics and Strategy from the FSU Jena, Germany. He has consulted and collaborated with different individuals and institutions including LBS, BusinessDay Media Ltd, and DGIC/AHK Nigeria. His interest in housing and mobility issues in Nigeria peaked after partnering with the Heinrich Böll Stiftung in Nigeria. He's currently consulting for africon GmbH while leading a group of young professionals in founding Native Insight.

Olamide Udoma-Ejorh is the Director at Lagos Urban Development Initiative. She is an Urban Activist – researcher, writer and artist, holding degrees in BSc Architecture, MA Design and MPhil Infrastructure Management. Olamide started her career in PR, giving her business and marketing foundation. She has worked in London, South Africa and Nigeria with various organisations focusing on transport management, slum upgrading and housing.

Damilola Oluwo is a lecturer and doctoral researcher at the Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Lagos.

Xavier Moyet is a Visiting Research Fellow in the Centre for Religion and Public Life at the University of Leeds. He also is a research associate of the PneumaCity project at the University of Kent.

Myth: The informal economy is an impediment to the prosperity of Lagos.

The informal economy is so-called because it exists mainly outside the formal oversight of government. Mostly comprising low-end, low-skilled occupations such as street trading, waste picking or care-giving, it nevertheless is the lifeblood of many cities today, providing flexible livelihoods and services, and contributing significantly to urban economies. According to international statistics, informal employment makes up 66%, 65% and 51% of non-agricultural employment in Africa, East Asia and Latin America respectively.

The reality in Lagos is no different. With its twenty million-and-counting inhabitants, its informal economy is large and growing. Keen to subject this prodigious sector to its authority for revenue and urban planning purposes, government continually seeks the compulsory formalization of the informal economy, often misunderstanding the nature of its operations and the symbiotic relationship it develops with the so-called formal economy. But, as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) notes, “informal activities, enterprises and jobs have not only persisted, but have also emerged in new guises and unexpected places”. As a shop owner recounted following an operation against street trading,

... [the evictions damaged] sales [because the traders] bought from us to resell ... [also] when customers ask for our shop they directed them to us ... now business is not moving anymore ... [the traders should be accommodated] because it will enhance sales and everybody will make a living.

Ironically, Lagos faces the ever-present challenge of creating gainful employment to promote economic inclusion and poverty alleviation for a rapidly expanding population. Key to solving this challenge is increasing productivity and leveraging the informal economy. Beneficial formal-informal linkages abound, with informal operators improving productivity owing to their nimbleness and ability to make goods more readily available to end users in sometimes unusual locations such as in Lagos' famous traffic jams.

Advocates argue for a gradual approach to formalizing the informal economy, involving innovative urban management, inclusive policies and partnerships with often poor informal workers. Lagos would do well to follow this approach as its diverse informal economy rather than being an impediment could potentially hold the key to its economic prosperity.



Myth: The city would thrive without informality.

Government in Lagos has long seen its informal sector as a problem child, an embarrassment in the drive to seduce investors and build a “world-class city”. Some would say government calls the dog a bad name to hang it, which is exactly what happens. The underserved shacks of informal settlements become luxury estates. The single table and cloth of informal commerce makes way for monstrous “ultramodern” shopping malls and plazas.

It does not matter how much investment, raised through sorrow, tears and blood, these people have committed to creating these thriving communities. Their settlements are informal and have to go. Markets at Alade and Tejuosho are transformed beyond the reach of most of their former occupants. Residents at Old Maroko and Taqwa Bay are forcefully evicted in favour of upmarket real estate.

The sector is an asset base to be nurtured not destroyed.

The blinding irony is that Lagos depends on this unwanted sector for 33% of its GDP, 70% of its housing and over 950 local markets for its trade and commerce. Rather than govern in denial, perhaps the Lagos State government should recognise that its informal sector needs to be optimised for operators, peoples and ironically, the government itself. The sector is an asset base to be nurtured not destroyed.

In plain terms, rather than demolish the local market, government should provide water, electricity, childcare, toilets, micro-sized stores and waste management. Then liaise with market operators to exercise some oversight over market operations. For informal settlements, the brief should be to provide the basic facilities, facilitate secure tenures, and exercise management oversight to record how the people manage these facilities for prosperity. This is the definition of good, inclusive and evidence-based governance.



Myth: Street trading is the cause of traffic problems in Lagos.

Estimates suggest that between 50% to 75% of Lagos's economy is informal. Perhaps the most visible representation of this sector in Lagos are opportunistic street traders, who, highly attuned to customer needs in “unusual” locations, sell everything from daily essentials (water, beverages, raw and prepared food, groceries etc.) to one-off items like consumer electronics. The street trader is either the highly mobile individual found in traffic jams or the relatively more affixed roadside vendor.

Both types of street vendor are often the bogeymen of municipal authorities in Lagos, who hold them responsible for vices ranging from opportunistic crime to traffic congestion. This has led to frequent but spottily enforced bans, arrests and even death.

Street trading is a consequence not a cause.

While it is true that they contribute to congestion by clogging up sidewalks and often encroaching into the street and parking areas, insights from a 2010 study into traffic congestion in Cairo suggest that in cities like Lagos, the major causes of traffic are more fundamental than street trading. Street trading is a consequence not a cause.

One major cause is the lack of effective and deeply integrated public transportation systems resulting in a higher rate of use of private cars. Others include police checkpoints and bad roads that choke traffic and force drivers to drive with an overabundance of caution.

As a result, people who have to spend long hours on the streets of Lagos often need to replenish their energy with food or drinks; and street vendors use the opportunities created to serve basic human needs and make a living.



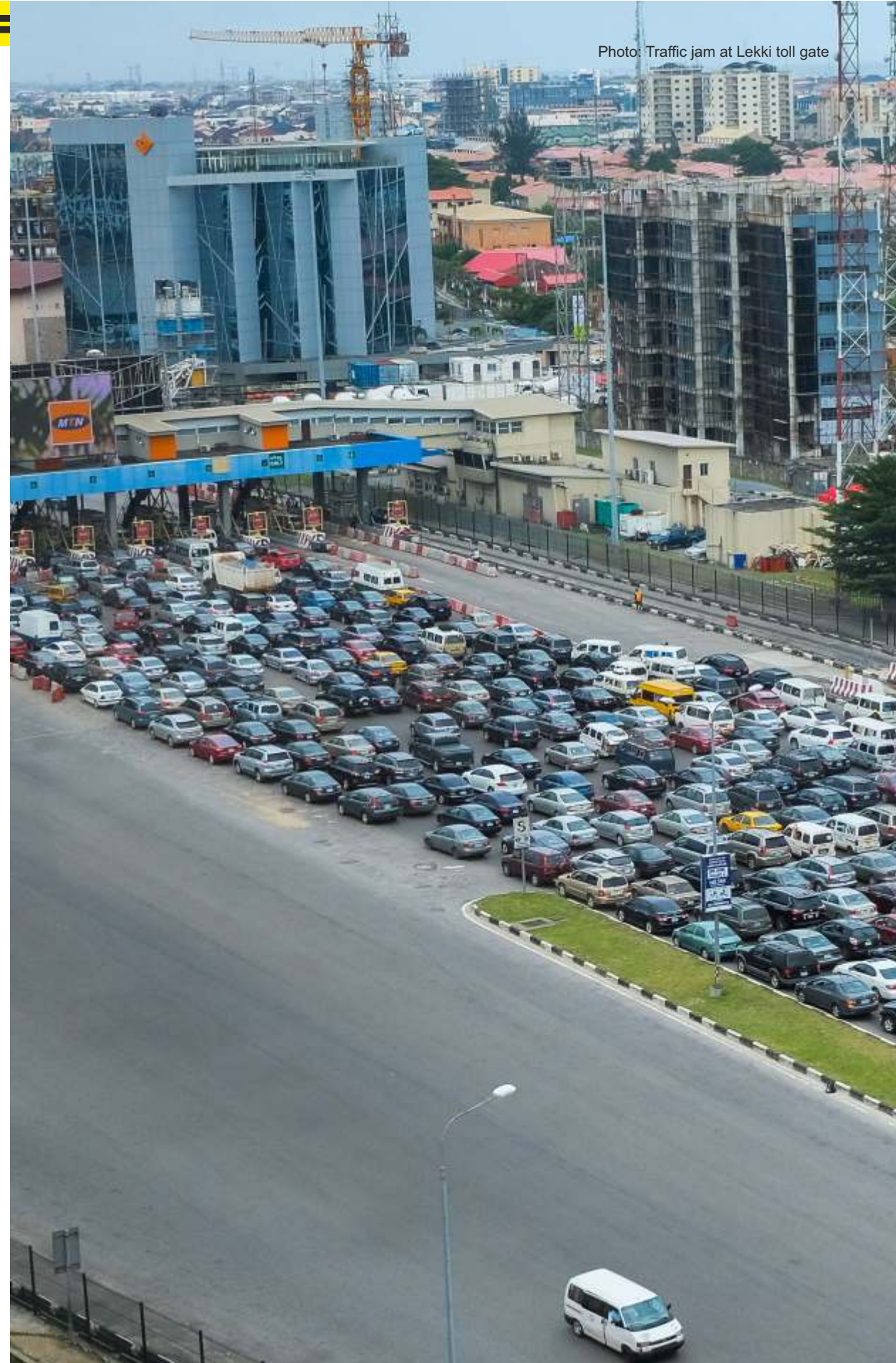
Myth: Street trading is the cause of traffic problems in Lagos. (2)

Street trading and hawking are not peculiar to urban Lagos. These activities often arise from socioeconomic realities essential to the proper functioning of society. Developing nations with large informal economies tend to have pronounced levels of street trading, which is a major source of jobs for the growing urban poor. Street trading and hawking that threatens mobility are often the consequences of policy failures.

Unrealistic policies that shun inclusiveness and are not pro-poor, are responsible for erroneous perspectives such as that street trading and hawking are blights to be eradicated, not realities to be accommodated. Improper road layout and public transport route plans that do not identify socially inclusive needs and interests are also culpable.

Street trading and hawking that threatens mobility are often the consequences of policy failures.

Constant displacement arising from this myth result in social exclusion, loss of livelihood and extreme poverty. Because women are disproportionately represented in these informal markets, market demolitions, vandalizations and goods seizures take a heavy toll on their livelihoods and, consequently, the health of households. As government pursues its own ends, women are pushed further into poverty and the inequality gap keeps expanding.



Myth: Cart pushers are a menace to the society.

In 2007, the Lagos State government promulgated a law banning the activities of cart pushers, the ubiquitous informal workers who go from door to door collecting and evacuating cartloads of waste from many neighborhoods (poor and rich ones alike) around the city. The prohibitive law completely overlooks the fact that cart pushers have stepped in to fill an essential gap in the formal waste collection system: the three-hundred-or-so private sector participant (PSP) operators that form the core of the system fall far short of the capacity that is required to serve the needs of a sprawling city like Lagos. Government's rigidity is inexplicable especially in light of the way the PSP system itself came to be: founding members were erstwhile informal waste collectors who were accorded formal status and support by the Tinubu administration in the early 2000s.

What is needed now is not a ban on the “menace” of cart pushers but a regime of enablement—the kind that has allowed local PSP operators to thrive and grow—and community oversight of cartpusher activity, ideally by local council development areas (LCDAs). An example of such a system exists in Accra, Ghana, where the authority to license waste collectors, both formal and informal, lies at

The prohibitive law completely overlooks the fact that cart pushers have stepped in to fill an essential gap in the formal waste collection system.

the level of the municipality (the local government), rather than at the level of the city. Decentralising authority in this way might rankle for a government so accustomed to top-down modes of governance, but it would pave the way for the waste workers who are closest to the ground to do their jobs even better, with optimal results for everyone.

by **Temilade Sesan**



Photo: Cart pushers sorting out waste

Myth: Eviction of communities and markets is done for environmental sanitation.

There are some very famous examples of whole communities, with homes and markets, that have been razed to the ground for no other reason than insanitary conditions. The militarized forced eviction in 1990 of 300,000 people in Maroko town, which violated domestic and international law, and the forced eviction of the Otodo Gbame waterfront community in 2017, are prime cases. Since many urban areas in Lagos are filled with poor housing and dirty chaotic open air markets, on the surface it certainly does give the impression that the root cause of the poor, unhygienic and dangerously risky conditions for health and safety is directly generated from the inhabitants and users of those places. Often the truth is closer to the fact that the authorities declaring those places unfit for humans are, through dereliction of duty, the actual cause of the unhealthy conditions.

...in most cases, the unhealthy conditions are the direct result of a dereliction of duty by relevant municipal authorities.

In Nigeria, local authorities have responsibility for markets, sanitation, local drainage and upholding planning regulations and enforcement but are let down by weakness and mismanagement and over centralized power. Proper urban planning, strong waste management systems, well maintained roads and adequate water supply would transform many communities and markets into safe environments for the people who live and work in them.

Unfortunately, the easier route and way out for authorities seems to be to bring in the bulldozers and then erect shopping malls and gated estates, which then become exclusive and not accessible to the people who have been displaced. Using public health concerns as a pretext for evictions is an age-old method which is used around the world for gaining access to lucrative real estate. Examples include the draconian 18th and 19th Highland Clearances in Scotland of poor overcrowded rural communities, suffering from disease and starvation, by brutal landlords to make way for 'improvements' under agrarian modernisation. Also, the controversial Hausmann masterplan for Paris in the mid-19th century, which resulted in over 300,000 of the city's poor being pushed out with no appeal, who were said to be living in dirty, diseased and cholera riddled inner city slums. These areas were replaced with expensive fashionable apartments which benefited the developers and middle classes as the property prices shot up.

by **Kofo Adeleke**



Myth: Slums in Lagos are synonymous with criminality.

Criminals. Miscreants. Urchins. Addicts. Thugs. Hoodlums. Prostitutes. Vagabonds. In many jurisdictions, including Lagos, these are the undignifying labels slapped on young people living in the under-served communities commonly called urban slums. Although little evidence exists linking slum habitation with criminality, the stereotypes are perpetuated and reaffirmed in popular and policy discourses on urban renewal and city regeneration.

In Lagos, these stereotypes inform official urban planning agendas. Under the guise of combating crime, security agents conduct frequent ruthless raids in the so-called slums, arresting and detaining its young population in a fruitless search for weapons. In 2018, for example, several of such raids conducted in Badia East, Ijora failed to turn up a single weapon despite many arrests. Instead, the detainees become victims of a crime when the police demand bribes as a condition for their release. In the quest for freedom, many sell off prized possessions to raise these bribes. Those who cannot raise the money languish in jail, slipping through the wide cracks of a flawed criminal justice system.

State authorities also adopt the pretext of combating crime to gentrify blighted neighborhoods. Mass evictions are conducted with lethal force and the land reallocated to new affluent owners or private property developers, who transform the area into luxurious housing estates pegged at prices beyond the reach of former owners. From Maroko to Makoko to Otodogbame, this pattern of violent gentrification has been consistent, displacing thousands and pushing them deeper into poverty.

These underhand tactics fuel mistrust, causing suspicion of even the finest urban development intentions. Tensions arise and slum dwellers are too poor to utilize conventional methods of conflict resolution. Attempts at legal and policy reform have been slow, elitist often excluding the target communities. For Lagos's teeming population living in precarious conditions in the urban slums, strategic action is now necessary to change the perception that criminalizes their landholdings, legitimizes their exclusion, and, consequently, exposes them to recurrent human rights violations.

Rather than perpetuate false stereotypes about slum dwellings and their inhabitants, the government needs to tackle the underlying reasons for slum proliferation. With the housing deficit in Lagos State towering above 3 million units, improving housing delivery and eliminating the widening disparities of access are essential. To this end, housing should not merely be an objective principle of state policy; rather, all tiers of government must ensure the dignity of all its citizens by guaranteeing it as a fundamental human right.



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Myth: If people didn't throw waste into drainage, we wouldn't have flooding.

Urban Lagos would still experience significant flooding if people did not dump waste in drainages. As is usual in Lagos, authorities tend to deflect responsibility by masking deep-rooted urban management problems with superficial excuses. Waste in drainages is not ideal and must not be encouraged but it only amplifies a more fundamental problem in Lagos' urban planning regime.

Lagos is mostly situated on a low-lying coastal plain, with many areas below sea level. The wetlands that should play a vital role in hydrological management and flood control are fast disappearing. Rapid urbanization has resulted in natural drainage channels being built over and blocked, restricting the flow of flood water. Many parts of Lagos are very densely populated, and the infrastructure has failed to keep pace with this growth, resulting in a drainage system which is unfit for purpose, and cannot cater for a population of over 20 million people.

Solving flooding in Lagos will require an honest confrontation with the accumulated impact of questionable urban planning decisions.

Although there is no statistical proof that overall rainfall in Lagos has increased, climate change has generally caused increasing global temperatures, changing weather patterns and extreme weather conditions (such as heavy thunderstorms and rainfall) that have put more pressure on an already vulnerable drainage system.

Just as in many other countries in Africa, Nigeria's weak waste management system is largely responsible for the rubbish clogging up drains and gutters, which, of course, exacerbates the existing problems. Solving flooding in Lagos will require an honest confrontation with the accumulated impact of questionable urban planning decisions.



Myth: If people didn't throw waste into drainage, we wouldn't have flooding. (2)

Establishing a relationship between drainage and flooding makes obvious sense, and lends some credence to the idea that flooding would disappear if waste disposal in drainages were to stop. But reducing the multiple dimensions of flooding in Lagos to the behavior of people is a misleading shortcut.

Fundamentally, Lagos is a coastal low-lying area and is therefore naturally prone to flooding. Gaps in the public infrastructure systems of waste management and waste-water collection, inadequate capacity of drainage channels, poor maintenance of facilities and the frequent bouts of torrential tropical rains result in an overwhelmed drainage system. This is further compounded by the presence of unauthorized structures along the drainage system, large-scale dredging and sand mining, and construction of luxury waterfront communities and new towns all over the city. They cumulatively affect the urban ecosystem in a manner that is detrimental to all. The floods of October 2019 resulted in several fatalities.

Changing climatic conditions contribute to flooding, with unpredictable downpours and flashfloods, as well as extreme weather events. In 2020 alone, Lagos is expected to have 270 days of rain. The world is recognizing climate change

... inadequate capacity of drainage channels, poor maintenance of facilities and the frequent bouts of torrential tropical rains result in an overwhelmed drainage system.

as an urgent environmental crisis that requires a coordinated global response; hence initiatives such as the Paris Accords.

Therefore, pointing an accusing finger at the public is over-simplistic and an attempt to shift responsibility. In order to address the current challenge of flooding in Lagos, people should not throw waste in the drainage, and the government must—as a matter of urgency—implement an integrated programme of waste management, drainage channel (re)construction and responsible land use planning. Attention must also be paid to climate mitigation and adaptation.

by **Taibat Lawanson and Xavier Moyet**

Photo: Sinking houses of Adeniji Adele



Myth: The informal sector, a drag on inclusive growth in Lagos.

In Lagos, funding an art festival without private sector sponsorship is near impossible and once the approach is made, the organisers' vision becomes subordinated to the marketing needs of the sponsor which is typically intended to drive up the sales of whatever product they are trying to push through the festival. The original vision becomes deemphasised to this commercial imperative and sets the tone for the programme design.

This was not different at the inception of the Tiwa N' Tiwa Street Art Festival; currently in its fifth year. As with most art festivals in Lagos, our fundraising efforts were focused on private sector organizations. However, without large participant numbers to show potential customer reach and engagement, securing sponsorship proved challenging. Thus, our ambition to create a socially inclusive arts and culture festival where young creative talents could thrive, local businesses are supported and communities experience increased economic activities through tourism seemed unachievable.

We were forced to think outside the box; realizing that festivals are communal, and a communal model was needed to stage it. With this goal in mind, we pulled together a motley alliance of informal sector operators including freelancers, artists, artisans, carpenters, electricians and tailors to make the festival possible. Unhindered in its very nature, over the past five years, the informal sector has allowed for the creation of a local network of workers and businesses who are able to support themselves, their families and their community by accommodating and adapting to the specific needs and changing demands of our growing festival.

However, some argue that the informal sector results in “involuntary growth”, which, unlike the preferred “evolutionary growth”, is not a *true* pathway to sustained economic growth. The questions we need to be asking ourselves are: (1) Why are current economic and urban strategies not leading to sustainable development solutions?; and (2) Is regulating, taxing and imposing fees on booth enterprises or vendors the best way to address extreme poverty?

Tiwa N' Tiwa Street Art Festival has shown that the informal sector can jumpstart a city's ability to accommodate workers, ideas and opportunities, and economic sustainability can be secured through the creation of local self-reliant community economies. So rather than dismiss it, what we need is a hybrid system that supports the opportunities resulting from booth enterprises by combining the flexibility and reliability of the informal sector with the infrastructure and relevant regulations of the formal economy.

Tiwa N' Tiwa Street Art Festival is an annual public space festival produced by A Whitespace Creative Agency.

by **Malaika Toyo**



Photo Credit: Damilola Onafuwa (Tiwa N' Tiwa Street Art Festival)

**Economic sustainability is best secured
by the creation of local or regional self-
reliant, community economies.**

Myth: Women are the weaker sex.

The belief that the woman is weak is an idee fixe in Nigeria's highly patriarchal society and often breeds exclusion from formal systems of governance and institutional support. With only 12.5% of the legislature and 29% of the executive council, women in Lagos continue to defy this stereotype by adopting informal methods of organization and support. The market women organization, for instance, is arguably the most formidable grassroots political network in the city.

Irrespective of socioeconomic status, many women experience “time poverty”, often juggling work with childcare and domestic chores.

Despite being more likely to repay bank loans, women suffer higher rates of exclusion from financial services than men. In turn, many women turn to mutual aid networks for economic support. From home-based enterprises to large conglomerates, women organizations like Makoko Savings Group and Women in Management, Business and Public Service (WIMBIZ) have provided a platform for targeted support and empowerment. Through rotational credit, for instance, Makoko Savings Group facilitates access to business capital and education funds for fisherwomen in the Makoko slums. WIMBIZ, on the other hand, is a convening of professional women that has directly impacted more than 40,000 women in the nineteen years of its existence through conferences, mentorship and capacity development programmes.

There's more. Irrespective of socioeconomic status, many women experience “time poverty”, often juggling work with childcare and domestic chores. Yet, they are more likely to invest their income in the household, surrendering about 90% to the household, compared to men who invest only about 20% to 30%. They are also the principal determinant of academic performance, even if girls are less likely than boys to attend school in conditions of extreme poverty: studies have shown that in Lagos, a mother's commitment to education is a more significant determinant of children's academic performance than family income.

Like many “fixed ideas”, the idea that the woman is weak is a product of ignorance.

by **Taibat Lawanson** and **Damilola Oluwo**



Many of the cities ranked above Lagos are functional and are not challenged by overstretched infrastructure, inadequate housing and poor land management.

Myth: Lagos is overpopulated.

With an estimated population of 19,400,000 and a population density of 6934persons per sq. km, Lagos is without doubt among the most populous cities in the world. This has resulted in many concluding that Lagos is overpopulated.

But is Lagos really overpopulated?

Using population density as a yardstick provides interesting insights. According to the 2019 update of Demographia World Urban Areas, of 1072 cities with population above 500,000, Lagos Metropolitan area ranked 323rd in terms of built-up urban areas by urban population density. As the table shows, cities such as Cairo, Hong Kong, Singapore, Seoul Incheon, Marrakech, to name a few, have a higher population density than Lagos yet they are considered functional model cities.

Therefore, why does Lagos feel overpopulated?

Lagos is challenged by overstretched infrastructure, inadequate housing, and poor land management. According to the 2010 Lagos House survey, only 9% of households surveyed lived in blocks of flats or high rise building that maximize space vertically. When juxtaposed with the lack of basic amenities and infrastructure in Lagos, this provides a classical example of poor land management. Furthermore, while the average population densities for Lagos State and Lagos Metropolitan Area are 6934 and 7500 respectively, zooming in reveals the uneven population distribution across local governments. In 2013 for example, while Ajeromi/Ifelodun was estimated to have a population density of 128,731, Ibeju Lekki's estimate was put at 190. Additionally, the monocentric nature of Lagos further fuels this perception. A situation where a drove of people drive to the few functional business districts in the morning and herd themselves back homes at night, results in the horrendous congestion experienced daily. This is further exacerbated by the lack of a function public transport system.

Evidence point to the fact that along with poor land management, population growth has not been accompanied by infrastructural provision. However, the Lagos State Government cannot be solely blamed for the present reality. While it is no secret that the Federal Government did not invest sufficiently in the infrastructural development of Lagos when it was the Federal Capital Territory, and even jettisoned some initiatives that would have transformed Lagos, it has continuously refused to recognize the special place Lagos holds in Nigeria and accord it the requisite privileges that cities like New York and London enjoy.

City	Population density (Per Square Kilometre)
Jakarta	10,200
Delhi	12,600
Manila	13,800
SeoulIncheon	8,900
Mumbai	26900
Dhaka	41,000
Cairo	8,800
Istanbul	10,200
Karachi	13,000
Shenzhen, G D	7,500
Kinshasa	22,200
Bogota	18,300
Honk Kong	26,100
Singapore	10,900
Abidjan	13,700
Dar es Salaam	8,500
Alexandria	17,300
Casablanca	16,500
Addis Ababa	8,600
Kano	12,300
Medellin	15,300
Uyo	13,000
Port Harcourt	13,500
Rabat	10,900
Hyderabad	16,400
Freetown	10,300
Niam ey	12,300
Aba	14,600
Marrakech	11,600
Mom basa	15,000
Kigali	11,100
Enugu	10,000
Shiraz	7,500
Lagos	7,500

Myth: Infrastructure means development.

At a special session of the National Economic Council in March 2018, Bill Gates dropped a bombshell. The Nigerian Federal Government Economic Recovery and Growth plan was flawed, he claimed, because it paid much less attention to human capacity development than it did to infrastructure. Gates' logic was simple: “to anchor the economy over the long term, investment in infrastructure and competitiveness must go hand-in-hand with investments in the people.”

Since 2000, Lagos has seen huge investments in big physical infrastructure projects like the Lekki-Epe Expressway, Oshodi Interchange and Eko Atlantic City. While these projects may be necessary to build the 'African Model Megacity' Lagos aspires to, investments in human capital—especially in health and education—have been identified as key drivers to inclusive growth in Africa. City governments in Kigali, Accra and Addis Ababa have taken this cue to commit huge resources to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) education and tech innovation programmes, but in Lagos, public expenditure in these areas has been paltry and inconsistent.

A good example is the CODE Lagos programme, which set itself the ambitious goal of making coding education accessible to 1,000,000 Lagosians. People were taught various coding languages including Scratch, Python, Java, Oracle's Alice and Greenfoot as well as mobile app development and blockchain technology, and by 2018, the programme had grown to include some 656 schools and 32 community centers. Unfortunately, it has now been streamlined to only primary and secondary schools, significantly reducing the pathways to prosperity that had been created for unemployed youth.

Health infrastructure is also weak. Lagos's 288 primary health centers, ordinarily the anchor of a healthy health sector, are incapacitated owing to poor staffing, inadequate equipment, poor distribution of health workers, poor quality healthcare, poor condition of infrastructure, and lack of essential drugs.

Juxtaposing the inadequacy of these sectors with the euphoria that often attends big infrastructural projects can be disorienting. To foster development, people need to be at the centre of Lagos's approach to infrastructure. As Jane Jacobs reminds us, 'People make cities, and it is to them, not buildings, that we must fit our plans.’



Gates' logic was simple: “to anchor the economy over the long term, investment in infrastructure and competitiveness must go hand-in-hand with investments in the people.”

Myth: Land acquisition is the best investment.

The general opinion that land ownership is the best investment is not only a myth, but a dangerous concoction that has led to land grabbing and speculation, fraud, family-land feud, perpetual tenant-landlord tension, and suboptimal use of land resources. On aggregate, it has perverse incentives.

Consider the generic case of a struggling young person in Lagos. They earn X amount and manage to save X amount after X years. One day, they encounter a real estate agent who convinces them to buy a piece of land in Ibeju Lekki for N1.5million. Because this young person is struggling, they cannot build on the land and decide instead to hold it in speculation, until it perhaps doubles in value, which may take anything from five to twenty years. Compare this to the regular trader who rents a shop in the centre of Lagos for N500,000 and uses the remaining N1million to buy goods. Most of the time, the trader doubles his investment in two years.

...developers, sometimes in concert with government, neglect the needy mass market to focus on luxury estates for the affluent...

And were our struggling young person to develop his land, he soon realizes, like many landlords, that the investment might not be recouped in his lifetime. The reaction of landlords is to charge outrageous rent over an incredibly short period to correct this “anomaly”. The tenant, who is perhaps nursing land ownership ambitions of his own, has no choice but to pay the exorbitant rent, perpetuating a vicious cycle of suboptimal decision-making that crowds out alternative, productive use of land and material resources.

With the level of private investments in the housing sector and real estate, one might assume that there will be a supply glut in the housing market. Rather, a unique market failure ensues from the inability of market participants to pursue a social optimum or even a competitive equilibrium. In the Nigerian housing sector, developers, sometimes in concert with government, neglect the needy mass market to focus on luxury estates for the affluent, who, as it happens, already own houses and estates. It is not unusual to hear state governors restate their commitment to affordable housing at the commissioning of a luxury estate, the people with the most pressing need are condemned to slums, squatter settlements and shacks.

by **Amamchukwu Okafor**

Photo: Estate development in Lekki Phase 1



Myth: Sand filling the lagoon to create real estate will solve the city's housing crises.

Lagos faces a huge housing challenge compounded by limited geographic space and its rapidly rising population. In the face of this tremendous challenge, the arguments for sandfilling water bodies are compelling. It creates new space, fosters new communities and can go some way in resolving the challenge of housing in Lagos.

The outcomes and impacts of sandfilling of water bodies could be positive or negative depending on number of factors including the purpose of the project, the scale of attention to environmental implications, and the technical details of construction. In the right combination, sandfilling can have a positive impact on society.

In Lagos, however, sandfilling has generally not tended to be public-minded. It is used not as a means of alleviating the state's housing crisis but instead as a profit-making exercise by affluent and connected developers.

In Lagos, sandfilling is not holistically taking into consideration the environmental sustainability of the city and overall reduction in the housing deficit rather the focus is on market oriented housing relying on the general social and economic status of Lagos as the industrial, cultural and economic hub of Nigeria. Development of luxury homes for small percentage of the city's population on the sandfilled area of the water is popular.

These luxury projects are outside the priority needs of the state. Therefore, the new spaces being created on water are not optimized towards addressing the state's housing priorities. Since the objective is to maximize returns, a major characteristic of these projects is intense space utilization, which not only has severe consequences on environmental sustainability but also leads to dislocation of the economic structure of many outlying communities.

In theory, sandfilling can help create a means to solve Lagos' housing crisis, but currently such is not the case.

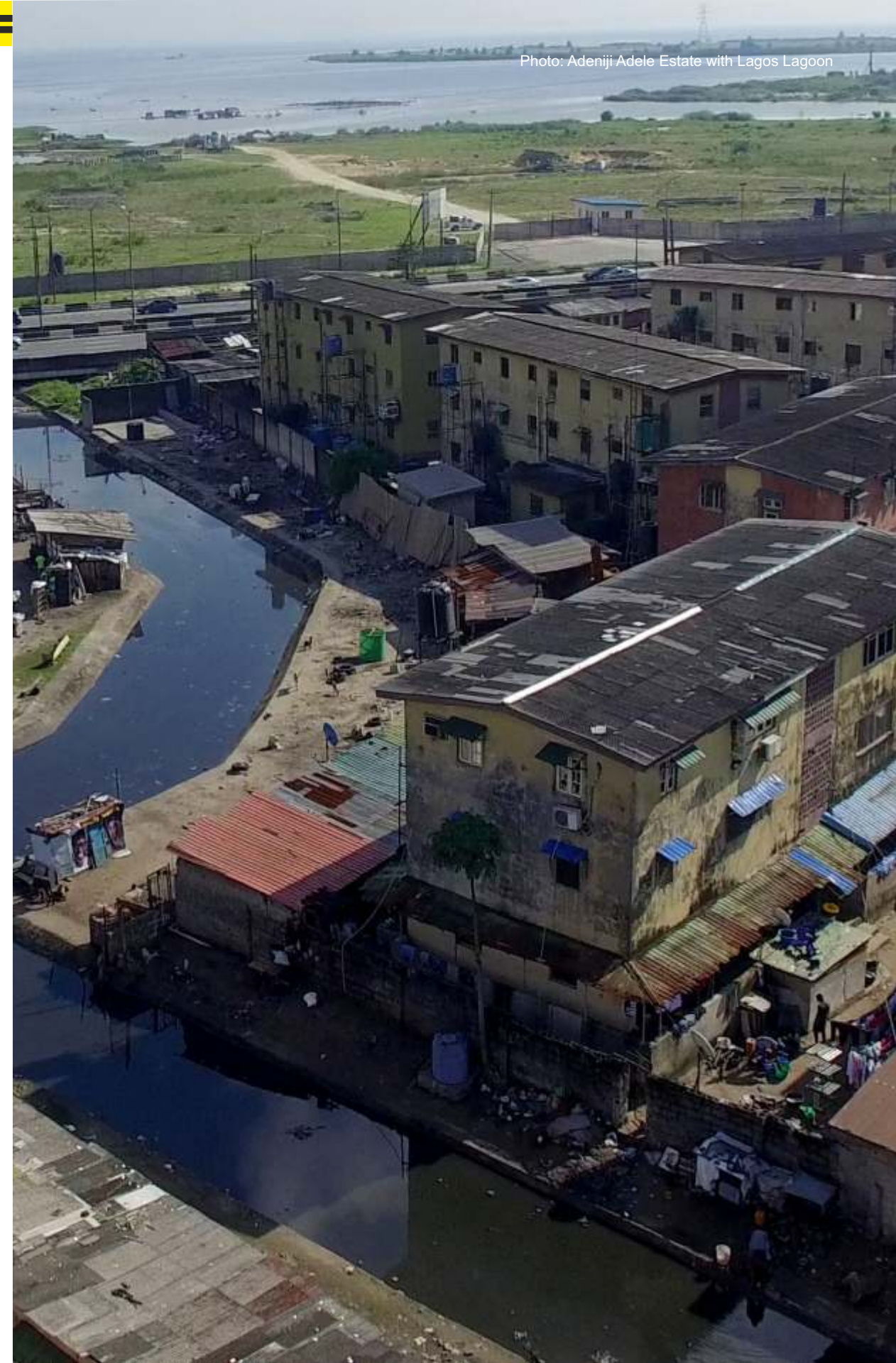


Photo: Adeniji Adele Estate with Lagos Lagoon

Myth: To reduce traffic congestion in Lagos we need more and wider roads.

It is easy to assume that the solution to traffic congestion in Lagos State is to build more roads or widen the existing roads so more cars can move at any one time. However, moving a large population with a density of around 6,871 residents per square kilometre with cars will continue to be an issue regardless of how many more roads are built. More roads will result in more cars on the roads, a vicious cycle that will produce more traffic congestion.

On the average, a car transports some two to three people from one point to the next. Then it sits empty for most of the day while parked. In the USA many downtown areas devote 50 to 60 percent of their scarce real estate to roads and parking infrastructure. In Lagos this space may be better used as housing or community spaces. Traffic congestion can only be reduced with an efficient and affordable multimodal system.

The Lagos Urban Transport Project I and II focus on mass transit with various modes including, Bus Rapid Transport (BRT), train and monorail. In addition, well-regulated water transportation could see millions of people move away from road transport. However, these urban transport projects do not take last-mile mobility into account, which is equally as important as long-distance transportation. This is really where the current informal transport sector could bridge the gap. Safe walking and cycling will also improve last-mile mobility, but they have to be made accessible including to people with disabilities.

To move people from private car use towards public transport, walking and/or cycling, all public transport options need to be efficient, comfortable, accessible and affordable. To encourage more public transport ridership, 'positive discrimination' towards public transportation is necessary. It is important to make public transportation more attractive while implementing car-restrictive policies, pushing people out of their private cars and making car ownership less attractive. Some examples of car-restrictive policies include increasing the cost of car parking, increasing the cost of automobile ownership and operations, and including traffic calming measure for single use cars, making it inconvenient to move around the city in a car. Cities can also reallocate road space to building public transport infrastructure, again making travel by car inconvenient. Public transport can be made more attractive by giving tax benefit or social amenity benefits based on daily commute distance when using public transportation.

In Lagos, transport planning needs to work closely with land-use allocation and be holistic. The focus needs to shift from cars to public transport. Overall, transport planners need to remember their aim is to move people (not vehicles) in the most efficient, comfortable, reliable and safe way.

by **Olamide Udoma-Ejorh**



It is important to make public transportation more attractive while implementing car-restrictive policies, pushing people out of their private cars.

Myth: Going green is not possible for the majority of Lagos.

A green lifestyle is aimed at reducing harm caused to the environment, usually by reducing pollution, conserving resources, conserving energy, reducing consumption and waste and protecting the earth's ecological balance.

The average Lagosian subconsciously already practices some green living. We use electricity sparingly because we do not have electricity twenty four hours a day. We repurpose drinking bottles for groundnut or palm oil. When clothes become too small we tend to give it to someone in need, bucket baths are a norm and in 2017 the National Bureau of Statistics revealed that there are 0.06 vehicles per person. This means the majority of the population use public transport or non-motorised transport (walking and cycling) and therefore have a low carbon footprint. Most Lagosians from the urban poor to middle income earners can be described as living a low-cost 'green' lifestyle, whether they live in an informal settlement or two bedroom apartment. This proves that going green is not expensive or time consuming. Because we are not conscious of our actions however, with more disposable income, it is likely we will move towards a more wasteful and less 'green' lifestyle.

There is more we can do at this point to ensure we continue to protect our environment. We can build homes that are energy efficient, thus reducing water consumption and the need for generators. We can recycle not just plastics, but cardboard, metals, glass, paper and much more. We can walk or cycle for short trips, use reusable bags at supermarkets and markets, and compost waste. Since power supply is already irregular, we might as well consider alternatives like solar power. Some solar energy companies are trying to keep the installation of solar power affordable by introducing mobile payments in small instalments. Bio-toilets, in a state like Lagos where 70% of the population do not have access to decent sanitation facilities, can provide affordable toilet facilities and also produce gas that can be used for energy and cooking.

Having green spaces is as important as reducing the number of cars on the roads. Green spaces reduce CO₂, can be used as community gardens and urban farms and encourage biodiversity. Dead spaces within the city can be converted easily and at a low cost to become green and thriving spaces. Lagos' wetlands—useful for sheltering wildlife, controlling floods, filtering pollution, fighting climate change, farming, recreation and tourism—need to be preserved. At the domestic level, people can grow vegetables and other plants for personal use.

Green initiatives do not need to be expensive or far-fetched. Local ideas and solutions can be put in place to ensure we all live more environmentally friendly.

by **Olamide Udoma-Ejorh**

Photo: Cyclists along Alausa Ikeja



Green initiatives do not need to be expensive or far-fetched. Local ideas and solutions can be put in place to ensure we all live more environmentally friendly.