

## HOMELESSNESS IN LAGOS NIGERIA: CHALLENGES TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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### ABSTRACT

Adequate shelter has always been one of man's basic needs; it is a significant component for human survival and a useful barometer for gauging societal development. As a unit of the environment, it has a profound influence on the health, efficiency, social behavior, satisfaction, productivity, and general wellbeing of the individual and the entire community. However, one of the critical challenges to sustainable development in the developing countries wherein Nigeria belongs is the lack of adequate shelter expressed in quantitative and qualitative terms. This problem has been necessitated by several factors, including persistent population increases, inadequate housing, and uncontrolled urban growth pattern resulting in "homelessness" among the vast majority of urban dwellers. The need to ensure decent and affordable shelter to the people, particularly the urban poor, is therefore central to the achievement and improvement of both human living standards and societal development.

This study contextually discusses this urban phenomenon, both its causes and consequences. It also discusses the concept of sustainable development. Through a pilot survey on the homeless of the Itire Community in Lagos, the study examines the effects of homelessness on the people and the challenges of inadequate housing to sustainable development in Nigeria. Through its findings, the survey revealed the deplorable living conditions of the homeless in Itire. It shows the extent to which the poor are deprived access to decent and affordable housing. The study, thus, justifies the need for adequate housing. It also provides a basis for direct official intervention in the urban housing delivery process towards achieving sustainable development in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Homelessness; Adequate Shelter; Challenge; Sustainable Development; Nigeria

### INTRODUCTION

Man in his quest for adequate shelter has consistently tried to reshape his immediate environment in order to provide a means of cover and protection from the external elements (Osasona, Ogunshakin & Jiboye, 2007; Jiboye, 2009). In spite of this quest and effort, the supply of adequate shelter has not been met.

In his introduction to *Man's Struggle for Shelter in an Urbanizing World*, Charles Abrams (1964a) observed that "despite man's unprecedented progress in industry, education, and the sciences, the simple refuge which affords privacy and protection against the elements is still beyond the reach of most members of the human race". In another contribution, Abrams (1964b) argued that "the technical genius that broke the secrets of light has not been able to produce enough housing

for the rank and file". Given these facts, it suffices to conclude that Abrams' observation and arguments, although they were expressed many decades ago, are, to a large extent, as valid today as they were then. The housing need has thus been an issue of global concern as the housing provision still remains one of the intractable problems facing mankind (Konadu-Agyemang, Noonam, & McCord, 1994). The most adversely affected in this regard are the urban poor, who constitute the majority in the developing countries of Africa and Asia wherein, according to a UN Report, consists of cities which now account for over 90 percent of the world's urban population growth (UN –Habitat, 2006).

In developing countries where there is rapid urbanization, the problem of inadequate housing for the people, especially among the low-income group, constitutes one of the major challenges to economic development and the welfare of citizens. Existing studies have shown the rate at which urban growth are increasing in most African countries, and the major factors for these rapid increases, relate to large-scale migration into the urban centers for employment and wealth acquisition, natural increase of the population, and lopsided concentration of investments by both governments and private organizations (Ajala, 2005; Jiboye & Omoniyi, 2010). Despite these rapid growths and population increases, evidence also revealed a rapid decrease in the addition of new housing stock, as well as poor state and inadequate urban housing infrastructures to support the increasing population (Aguda & Ajala, 1998; Jiboye, 2009).

The situation in Nigeria, for instance, is by no means different, as the proportion of the population living within the urban centers has increased phenomenally over the years; rising from an initial 7 percent in the 1930s to more than 10 percent in the fifties. The figure rose from 20 percent in the seventies to about 27 percent and 35 percent in 1980s and 1990s, respectively. During these periods, particularly the oil boom era in Nigeria, major cities, including Lagos, witnessed a massive influx of the rural dwellers (Metz, 1991; Jiboye & Omoniyi, 2010). However, a United Nations (2007) report on Nigeria had indicated an urban growth rate of 5.8% annually. The report estimated that over 43% of Nigerians, which amounts to 62.66 million people now live in the urban centers. This incidence of population explosion has, therefore, created severe developmental problems, ranging from inadequate infrastructure, deterioration of available social amenities, and more importantly, acute shortage of decent and affordable housing. This situation has resulted into overcrowding, proliferation of deprived settlements, increased poverty and high crime rates and, to an extreme case, outright homelessness (Abiodun, 1997; Jiboye, 2009).

There is, however, a global acknowledgement that shelter is one of the basic necessities of life and a barometer for gauging development (Douglass, 2008; Jiboye & Ogunshakin, 2010), yet, its provision is in short supply. A United Nations' report in 1994 had indicated that more than one billion people (about one fifth of the world's population) are poorly housed or have inadequate shelter (United Nations Centre for Human Settlement, 1994). Another United Nations' report had earlier estimated that by the year 2000, the urban population in Nigeria would be about 60 million and that this would represent about half of the total national population. Thus, it would require over 6 million new housing units, spread over a period of twenty years, to meet the housing requirement of the urban population (Aguda & Ajala, 1998).

In recognition of the global housing need and the consequent homelessness pervading most communities, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlement (Habitat) had inaugurated a world Habitat day in 1987 with the theme, *Shelter for the Homeless*. The aim of which was to explore ways of addressing the problem of global poverty and homelessness and to encourage various national governments to pay more attention to the shelter needs of their citizens (United Nations Centre for Human Settlement, 1993).

In Nigeria, successive national governments have been accepted in principle as part of their National Development plans, to ensure that all citizens have access to a relatively decent and affordable housing. Along this direction, it introduced and established a National housing policy with the aim of providing an institutional frame work for ensuring adequate housing both quantitatively and qualitatively (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1991). In spite of these efforts, little or no success has been made to meet the housing needs of the growing urban population. While noting that decent and habitable housing is a basic human need, the right of every individual and a significant component of the social dimension of sustainable development (National Affordable Housing Association, 2006), a large proportion of Nigerians still live in sub-standard, make-shift dwellings. The need to ensure decent and affordable shelter to the people, particularly the urban poor, is, therefore, central to the improvement of their living standard, as well as in achieving a sustainable, societal development.

Considering the severity of inadequate housing and its consequences on the urban poor, the issue of homelessness has not attracted much official attention in Nigeria. By positing the case of the homeless in the Itire Community of Lagos Nigeria, this study examines the issue of inadequate shelter in the context of “homelessness” and the challenges posed to sustainable development in Nigeria. The main intent of the study is to justify the need for adequate housing in order to provide a rationale for direct official intervention in the urban housing delivery process towards achieving sustainable housing development in Nigeria.

#### *A global perspective of Homelessness.*

Homelessness, as defined by Wright (2007), “is the condition of people who lack regular legal access to adequate housing”. Wikipedia, the free Encyclopedia (2010) defines it as “the condition and social category of people without a regular house or dwelling because they cannot afford, do not desire, or are otherwise unable to maintain regular, safe, and adequate housing, or lack, fixed, regular, and adequate night time residence”. The term *homelessness* may also include people whose primary night time residence is in a homeless shelter, in an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized, or in a public or private place not designed for use as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings. The actual legal definition varies from country to country, or among different entities or institutions in the same country or region.

Rehman and Gahagan (2003), in their report on Harm Reduction in Canada, also defined homelessness as “the lack of a safe place where individuals and families can grow and contribute to the ‘quality of life’ in their community”. The “homeless”, as defined by the United States Federal Code 42 (2006), “is an individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate night time residence”. The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (2009) defines a “chronically homeless”

person as "an unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition who has either been continuously homeless for a year or more, or has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years" (Wikipedia, the free Encyclopedia, 2010).

The issue of homelessness and lack of access to decent housing have, over time, attracted global concern. Since early 1980s and 1990s, developed countries, such as the U.S and Canada have recognized this issue as a significant social problem, plaguing both the people and national development; however, concerted efforts have been directed at addressing it. A report by the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty in the U.S indicate that almost two million people are homeless on any given night in America (Almanac of Policy Issues, 2010). In another report, the National Coalition for the Homeless (2009) noted that homelessness constitutes a devastating experience for families. It disrupts virtually every aspect of family life, damaging the physical and emotional health of family members, interfering with children's education and development, and frequently resulting in the separation of family members.

Existing data obtained from Wikipedia, the free Encyclopedia (2010) has shown that the number of homeless people worldwide has grown steadily in recent years. In 2005, an estimated 100 million people worldwide were homeless. The following statistics thus indicate approximate average number of homeless people at any given time. In United Kingdom, the homeless were estimated to about 10,459 rough sleepers who had no access to any form of shelter, and 98,750 households who reside in temporary accommodation. In Canada, it was 150,000 people, while a night count across Australia in 2006 estimated the number of homeless to 105,000 people; an increase from the 99,900 Australians who were counted as homeless in the 2001 census. A homeless assessment report by the Housing and Urban Development in the U.S. in 2008 showed that there were 671,888 sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons nationwide in the United States. Also, the Housing and Urban Development reported the number of chronically homeless people (those with repeated episodes or who have been homeless for long periods) as 123,833 people. In Japan, reports showed that homelessness is on the increase since the mid-1990s, rising from 20,000 people to about 100,000 people. Also, in some Third World nations, such as Nigeria, Ghana, and South Africa, homelessness is rampant, with millions of children living and working on the streets (Wikipedia, the free Encyclopedia, 2010). In Ghana, for instance, homelessness is occurring at an alarming rate, with seventy percent of homeless people being under the age of 20 and approximately 53 percent below 18 years of age. Homelessness, as a problem, lacks a tangible denotation; consequently, the issue of homelessness is much more complex and multi-dimensional, ultimately resulting in the lack of effective solutions and policies which would alleviate the epidemic (Ghana web, 2009).

In countries like China, India, Thailand, Indonesia, Russia, and the Philippines, homelessness has also become a serious problem despite their growing prosperity. The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (1995) wrote in its *Global Report on Human Settlements* that, "homelessness is a problem in developed as well as in developing countries". In London, for example, life expectancy among the homeless is more than 25 years lower than the national average. The report noted that poor urban housing conditions are a global problem, but conditions are worst in developing countries, and that today, 600 million people live in life and health-threatening homes in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The threat of mass homelessness is greatest in these regions because of their very rapid population growth (Wikipedia, the free Encyclopedia, 2010).

### *Causes and Consequences of Homelessness*

In many parts of the world, several reasons have been provided to explain the dramatic increase in the number of homeless people. Studies have shown that poverty, lack of affordable housing, and domestic violence are the principal causes of family homelessness in America and Canada; and this has increased overtime (Rehman & Gahagan, 2003; National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009). The divide between people of upper and lower incomes has continued to widen. In Canada, for instance, available data from the 2001 Census illustrated that people in the upper 10% income category have seen an increase of 14% in their financial situation, while those in the lower 10% category have only obtained a very small increase of less than 1%. In Nova Scotia, 147,020 people, or 16.6% of the population, could be classified in 2000 as living in low income. This percentage is above the national average which is 16.2%. At the same time, a lack of affordable housing has resulted in an inability to obtain adequate, appropriate, and affordable housing. In many cases people are being required to spend larger amounts of money to obtain substandard housing or are not able to acquire accommodation due to unemployment rates, family violence and abuse, and the cancellation of government support (Rehman & Gahagan, 2003).

Also in America, a report has it that in recent years, the percentage of poor people has increased significantly; from 11.3% of the population in 2000 to 12.1% in 2002. By 2004, the number of poor people grew to 4.3 million. Today, 35.2% of persons living in poverty are children. In fact, the 2004 poverty rate of 17.8% of children under 18 years old is significantly higher than the poverty rate for any other age group (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009). Another significant factor linked to homelessness is mental health issues and/or addictions, for a clear link has been established between access to a stable living situation and health (Gilbertson, Green, Ormandy, & Thomson, 2008). People living with mental health issues and/or addictions are continuously challenged in obtaining access to decent and affordable housing. Due to stigma, discrimination, and a variety of complex social issues, access to appropriate housing may be compromised (Rehman & Gahagan, 2003; Wright, 2007). However, there has been a generally inadequate understanding of homelessness, which constitutes a challenge to finding appropriate solutions to the problem. Part of this challenge results from a lack of clarity regarding the definition of homelessness. Challenges have also existed with determining who is considered to be homeless (Rehman & Gahagan, 2003).

While acknowledging the contributions of the very few studies and attempts to address homelessness in some parts of the world, particularly in Europe and America, much has not been done in Nigeria, neither through research nor by official intervention to address this problem. This present study in Itire Community in Lagos is, thus, an attempt aimed at examining urban homelessness and its challenges to sustainable development in Nigeria.

The outcome of the study could serve as a feedback for the formulation of an appropriate policy towards ensuring adequate housing to the entire citizenry.

### **THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

The World Commission on Environment and Development in their report, known as *Our Common Future*, defines the concept of sustainable development as “development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Furthermore,

the National Affordable Housing Agency of Britain (2006) describes the concept as that which “ensures a better quality life for everyone, now and for generations to come”. In a broader form, it is the process of building our communities so that we can live comfortably without consuming all of our resources. This implies living in a sustainable way by leaving more of things we all need to share. It is not just about consuming resources, but about changing our culture to make conservation a way of life. This creates long-term economic stability, but does not create short-term profits (MediaWiki, 2008).

In recent times, the concept of sustainable development has been one of the most discussed and adopted global topical issues. The concept is a shift from a mere sustained growth of a society, to the level whereby such growth does not jeopardize the need of the future generation. Sustainable development is premised on the articulation and incorporation of environmental and human needs in the pursuit of economic growth and development objectives. It, however, has human, socio-economic, and physical development dimensions (Oduwaye, 2009).

Early debates on sustainable development did not give much emphasis on the physical dimension of the concept. Rather, attention was focused on the need to create “green cities” (Leff, 1990, cited in Oduwaye, 2009). It later became apparent that sustainability cannot be achieved in other facets of human development without the compliment of the physical environment. Thus sustainable physical development came into the fore of global debate in 1992, during the United Nations Rio-de Janeiro Conference on Environment and Development; and later in 2002 World Summit in Johannesburg. However, it was the 1996 Habitat II in Istanbul that brought into the fore the issue of sustainable human settlement and adequate shelter for all (UN-Habitat, 2007).

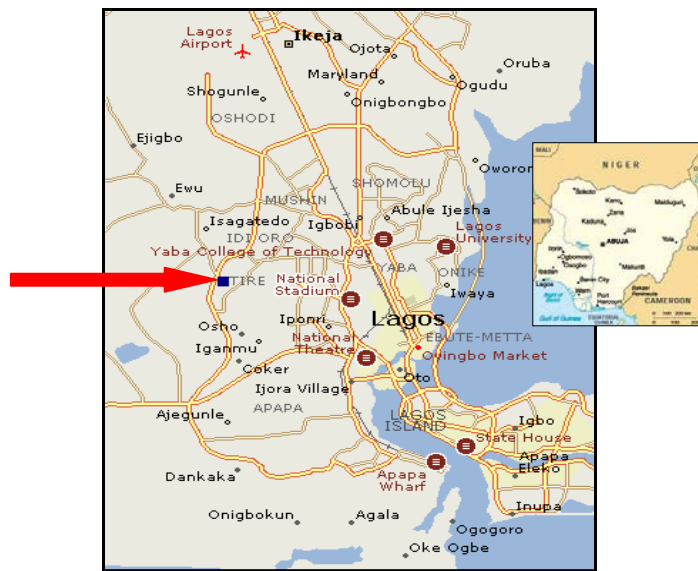
It is the realization of the need for sustainable development and the eradication of poverty that led to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals Summit in September 2000 in New York. Among key developmental issues addressed by this Summit are those relating to poverty reduction, health, gender equality, education, and environmental sustainability, specifically, the seventh goal of the Agenda which focuses on ensuring sustainable development through housing and slum improvements in all the cities of the world, particularly, in developing nations (United Nations Department of Public Information, 2008).

In the area of human settlement, basic yardsticks of sustainability, as established by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (1996), are quality of life of inhabitants, scale of non-renewable resource use, extent of recycling and re-use, the scale and nature of renewable resource use, waste emanating from production and consumption activities, as well as the impact of these wastes on environmental health and ecological systems. Agenda 21 of the Earth Summit focused on the sustainability of cities at two levels: first, at the global level, it involves a range of issues concerning long term sustainability of the earth; secondly, at the local level, which involved the possibility that urban life may be undermined from within because of congestion, pollution, waste generation, and their accompanying social and economic consequences. Eight relevant programs specifically aimed at addressing the shelter needs of the people were outlined within the agenda (Oduwaye, 2009).

Significant to this study is the need to achieve sustainable human settlements through the provision of adequate housing and the eradication of homelessness, particularly in Lagos, Nigeria. Through a pilot survey, the study examined the homeless situation in Itire, its consequences on the people, and the entire community. The study provides relevant recommendations that could aid in policy formulation towards addressing the problems of homelessness in Nigeria.

## THE STUDY AREA

Itire Community is a semi-urban area situated in the central part of the Mushin Local Government Area of Lagos State Nigeria (see Figure 1). It is located within approximately  $3^{\circ}20'$  west longitude and  $6^{\circ}30'$  north latitude (Duse & Ojo, 1978; Encarta Student, 2009). The community covers a total area of about 6 square kilometers and maintains a warm tropical climate-type with dense vegetation. The area is located at the edge of the coastal lowlands away into the foothills of Yoruba plains. Its land surface is flat and sandy, rising to about five meters above the sea level.



**Figure 1.** Itire Community in Lagos, Nigeria

The original inhabitants of the area are the Aworis, who have been occupying there before the colonial period. The population of the community has rapidly been increasing over the years due to the uncontrolled influx of the people from the rural and neighboring communities. This accounted for the very high level of housing congestion and noticeable slum situation evident in the area (Figure 2). There are indications that most of the houses in Itire belong to the Yoruba traditional compound type, as well as the Afro-Brazilian types, majority of which are clustered without any planned accessibility linking them due to the non-consideration for proper planning in the housing layout within the community.



**Figure 2:** Congested and deplorable living condition

### **METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION**

In Itire, five different locations were identified for this survey. These include the market place, motor parks, residential neighborhoods, as well as vehicular and pedestrian bridge locations. Specifically, these locations were found within places like Odo-eran, Dosunmu, Omotashe compound, Odo-fin compound, and the Night market area. Samples were taken from each of these locations in Itire Community, with the aid structured questionnaire to elicit relevant information on the socio-economic and housing characteristics of the respondents who have been affected by the problem of inadequate housing. Such respondents were found mostly in commercial areas and residential hideouts of the community. In order to ensure equal representation of the entire area, forty (40) copies of the questionnaire were administered randomly on respondents in each of the selected locations within the area. Consequently, a total of 200 questionnaires were administered. Data was analyzed by simple statistical frequency tables. Photographic illustration was employed to provide additional information on the existing housing situation.



## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

**Table1: Socio-economic background of the sampled respondents**

	Frequency	Percentage
<b>(a)Sex</b>		
Male	102	51.0
Female	98	49.0
Total	200	100.0
<b>(b)Age</b>		
<b>Total</b>	200	100.0
<b>(c) Marital status</b>		
	66	33.0
Single		
Married	60	30.0
Divorced		
Widowed	31	15.50
Separated	25	12.50
	18	9.0
Total	200	100.00
<b>(d) Occupation</b>		
Alms begging	29	45.0
Night guard	19	9.5
Bus conducting	40	20.0
Petty trading	38	19.0
Call girls	28	14.0
Touting	22	11.0
Butchering	34	17.0
Total	200	100.0
<b>(e)Average Income</b>		
Below N2,000 (\$14 )	88	44.0
N2,001 – N4,000 (<\$28)	58	29.0
N4,001 - N6,000 (<\$42)	54	27.0
Above N 6,000 (>\$42)	-	-
Total	200	100.0
<b>(f) Size of household</b>		
1-3 persons	65	32.5
4-6 persons	96	48.0
Above 6 persons	39	19.5
Total	200	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2010.

### ***Personal and Household's Characteristics of Respondents***

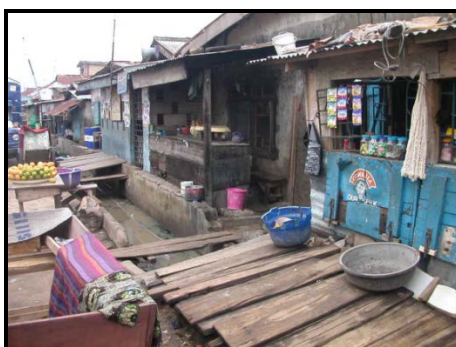
As shown in Table 1, 51% of the respondents are males while 49% are females, who are 21 to 60 years old. 30% of the people in this age bracket are married households, while 33%, 12.5%, and 15.5% are single, widowed, and divorced, respectively. By substantiating an earlier report by Rehman & Gahagan (2003) and National Coalition for the Homeless (2009), the figures suggested that a high proportion of the homeless consists of both genders, the families, youths, and older people, confirming the severity of housing problems as well as its effects on the urban residents in Itire.

The study further revealed that a good majority of the respondents does not have any particular means of livelihood. Only a few of them, 20%, 19%, 17%, and 9.5% engage in bus conducting, petty trading, meat selling/Butchering, and Night guarding, respectively, while others (45%), (14%), and (11%), who appeared very reluctant to respond, probably engaged in alms-begging, prostitution, and touting activities, respectively. The income level of these categories of respondents confirmed their state of abject poverty as most of them (44%) earn less than \$14 monthly; while others, 29% and 27% earn less than \$28 and \$42 per month, respectively. This amount falls below an average of \$1 per day, and considering the present high cost of living in Nigeria, it is evident that majority of these respondents could not adequately feed themselves, their dependants, talk-less of securing a decent accommodation for themselves. The only option available to them was to seek refuge on the streets and in various make-shift tents and hideouts. Again, this finding substantiates earlier finding by Rehman and Gahagan (2003), indicating the extent to which the poverty level of most families have subjected them to homelessness in many parts of the world. These problems have been further compounded by the fact that most of the respondents have many children and other dependants, all of whom live under these sub-human conditions.

The study revealed that some of the adult respondents (48%) have 4 to 6 people per household, while others have more. The consequence of this scenario is overcrowding and poor living condition, which is very evident in the study area (Figures 3, 4, and 5).



**Figure 3:** Makeshift dehumanizing dwellings



**Figure 4:** Economic activity within dwelling area



**Figure 5:** Unhealthy living condition within abandoned dwelling area. (Occupants prone to water-borne diseases)

### ***Housing characteristics and options of the Respondents***

In assessing the housing characteristics of the respondents in Itire, the survey on housing options or preferences revealed that 26%, 20.5%, 15.5%, and 14.5% of the respondents reside in makeshift sheds under bridges, in broken down vehicles, abandoned buildings, and in bus and taxi park sheds, respectively, while others (23.5%) reside in temporary sheds in street hideouts. Reasons given by respondents in opting for these types of abode vary. While some (47%) claimed their inability to afford any form of decent accommodation due to poor financial statuses and joblessness, others (53%) claimed they were from broken homes and divorced parents. Among these groups, some claimed they were originally well-housed prior to their present homeless situation. While 19.5% of them resided with their parents, 32.5% resided with friends, 14% in a family house, and 16%, who were originally married but now divorced females had to relocate to their present makeshift abode in Itire.

Some of these respondents (41%) claimed they have been homeless for about 4years; while others, 26%, 19%, and 14%, claimed to have been homeless for between 5 to 9 years, 10 to 14 years, and over 15 years, respectively. Through an informal interaction with the respondents, there was indication that the long duration of residents in their present place of abode has conditioned their lifestyles to this form of abode. However, there were indications that if the respondents were given a better option they would have preferred it; as the survey showed that the majority (41.5%) preferred to remain and be settled within the urban city center, while 29.5% preferred being housed in an organized government housing estate, and others, 29%, preferred relocating to the city suburbs or outskirts (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Respondents' housing characteristics and options**

	Frequency	Percentage
<b>(a) Shelter options</b>		
Makeshift under bridges	52	26.0
Broken down vehicle	41	20.5
Abandoned buildings	31	15.5
Bus & Taxi park sheds	29	14.5
Sheds in street hideouts	47	23.5
Total	200	100.0
<b>(b) Reasons for options</b>		
		<b>22.0</b>
Unable to pay high rent	44	53.0
Broken home	106	
Not gainfully employed	50	<b>25.0</b>
No specific reason	-	-
Total	200	<b>100.0</b>
<b>(c) Previous abode</b>		
With parents	39	19.5
Relatives	36	18.0
Matrimonial home	32	16.0
Squatting with friends	65	32.5
Family house	28	14.0
Total	200	100.0
<b>(d) Duration of being homeless</b>		
Below 5 years	82	<b>41.0</b>
5-10 years	52	<b>26.0</b>
11- 14 years	38	<b>19.0</b>
Above 15 years	28	<b>14.0</b>
Total	200	100.00
<b>(e) Preference for present abode</b>		
City center	83	41.5
Government Estate	59	29.5
Fringe of city/outskirt	58	29.0
Total	200	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2010.

### ***Effects of Homelessness on the Respondents***

Going by the results of this survey shown in Table 3, it is evident that the effects of homelessness on the sampled respondent at Itire are numerous, having adverse socio-economic and psychological implications. The respondents gave diverse opinions and reactions towards their homeless experience. About 45.5% claimed that their abode offered them a sense of insecurity and isolation, especially at nights when many undesirable persons (lunatics, criminals, and drunkards) and other socially estranged beings invade their abode. They also experienced social segregation from participating in normal life of the larger community, thus making them neglected, maladjusted, and consequently suffer a loss of respect, among other people in the society.

Others (54.5%) claimed that the effect of homelessness on them is pathetic because of their social neglect, poverty, and loss of respect. The majority found it difficult to be gainfully employed; hence the means to improve their living standard and financial status seemed impossible. The implication of these findings on the respondents is that some of them eventually became redundant, having lost their skills and vocational competence. Some became prone to moral and social depravity by resorting to various antisocial behaviors, like smoking, drinking, crimes, and drug addiction in an effort to adjust to their unpleasant situations.

**Table 3: Effects of homelessness on the Respondents**

	Frequency	Percentage
Insecurity	90	45.5
Social neglect and poverty	110	54.5
Total	200	100.0

*Source: Field survey, 2010.*

It is evident through the findings of this study that the problem of poverty and homelessness is predominant and peculiar to urban city centers of most developing countries, such as Nigeria. Also, the consequences of rapid urbanization resulting from population influx into the cities without a commensurable provision of adequate shelter and urban infrastructural amenities have been major causes of homelessness. In the study area of Itire community, the situation has not been different, as most of the respondents were found to be jobless, while those having one form of job or the other do not earn more than \$14 monthly (an equivalent of ₦ 2,000 monthly, which falls below the official minimum wage of ₦ 7,500 payable in the Nigeria Civil Service employment). The implication of this scenario is that those affected would hardly be able to feed well. Also, they would not be able to secure a decent accommodation for themselves and their dependants.

An alternative means of shelter for the respondents in Itire was to seek refuge on the street corners and hideouts, underneath bridges, bus stop sheds, abandoned buildings and vehicles, dilapidated buildings, and makeshift slum-like dwellings (Figures 2, 3, 4, and 5). This situation could be responsible for the high level of crimes and other anti-social practices, overcrowding, and various health hazards that characterized most urban areas in Nigeria. On the part of the homeless, the study revealed that, socially, they suffer rejection, neglect, and loss of respect within the larger community. Morally, they suffer diverse abuses,

and children of some of those affected consequently resorted to street begging or petty stealing and drug addictions; while the females are exposed to sexual abuses in order to secure a means of livelihood. Psychologically, the homeless in Itire are subjected to a loss of self confidence and self-actualization. They found it difficult to re-integrate into the larger community, having been perceived as being socially undesirable. Significantly, the pathetic homeless experience and the deplorable situation in the Itire Community and other cities requires urgent intervention from the government and other concerned stakeholders responsible for housing and urban development in Nigeria. The need to ensure adequate housing to cater for the shelter needs of the homeless thus constitutes a challenge to sustainable development.

### **HOUSING THE HOMELESS: IN DEFENSE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA.**

The homeless has been broadly described as those who lacked real homes, and had no access to safe water, security, sanitation, means of employment and health care. They are the displaced disabled, wandering psychotic and vagabonds, as well as the poor aged who lacked access to land and financial resources (Rehman & Gahagan, 2003; Wright, 2007; National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009). If the hopes and expectations of the homeless in our society were to be revived towards a better shelter and improved living conditions, then the prompt intervention of the government and all those concerned with planning and reshaping our cities is desirable.

Considering the rate at which the urban population continues to rise in recent times, coupled with the lack of adequate housing to cater for this increase, there is the need to revisit the shelter issue in line with the various resolutions by the United Nations, particularly the UN general assembly resolution 37/221 of 1982, which recognizes the need for housing the homeless as well as poverty eradication (United Nations Centre for Human Settlement, 1993). This recurring shelter issue also formed part of the discussions at the UN 1996 Istanbul Agenda and that of the New York 2002 Millennium Development Goals Summit, where specifically, the need for poverty reduction, slum improvement, and adequate shelter for the poor, towards achieving sustainable human settlement, has been given particular attention (UN-Habitat, 2007; United Nations Department of Public Information, 2008). In recognition of this global housing need, the government at federal and state levels should therefore pay more attention to the shelter and employment needs of their citizens.

Poverty has been described by Collins English Dictionary (2006) and United Nations Centre for Human Settlement (1994) as a state of being poor and the lack of means to get the necessities of life, such as housing and food. Therefore, homelessness is a consequence of poverty. The problem of urban unemployment should be radically addressed by the government, while also ensuring that the low income earners are adequately empowered to have access to land and credit facilities that would enable them acquire their own houses. This could be achieved through direct access to subsidized building materials and sourcing of alternative, locally initiated, building construction technology.

Of immense significance is the provision of adequate basic infrastructures for the urban residents in order to complement existing efforts at increasing urban housing stocks. In order to ensure that the cities are preserved and prevented from further degeneration and homelessness, sanitation practices should be enforced, while the socially displaced persons, the vagabonds, as well as the wandering psychotics should be rehabilitated and reintegrated into the larger community.

While recognizing shelter as a basic human right and an important social commodity, the government should institute a legal framework to ensure its provision; hence, the existing low cost housing program strategies of the government in Nigeria should be re-evaluated to ensure its relevance in providing subsidized housing to the poor and low-income classes. Although the recommendations resulting from this study are not the only panacea for solving all the problems of homelessness, they provide a frame of reference upon which other courses of action could be based.

## CONCLUSION

The study has examined the challenges of homelessness to sustainable housing development in Nigeria. Through a pilot survey carried out on the homeless in the Itire Community of Lagos, the study revealed the deplorable and pathetic situations of the homeless and urban poor in Nigerian. The study showed that poverty, unemployment, overpopulation, inadequate housing are among other several causes of homelessness. In substantiating studies by Rehman, and Gahagan (2003), and National Coalition for the Homeless (2009), the finding indicates that the homeless consists of people of both genders: - male and female, the married and single people, the divorcee, and the youths and older people alike. The study justified the need for urgent attention from government and other stakeholders towards addressing the problems of homelessness and inadequate housing among the urban poor and those that are deprived access to decent shelters. Unlike the developed nations where concerted efforts are being made to address the problems of homelessness, the homeless situation in Nigeria and other developing countries appears pathetic. The need to make the housing provision the focal issue in the national development programs is therefore, central to the achievement of a sustainable society and the improvement of the living standard of the people.

Homelessness is a product of a complex set of circumstances that require people to choose between food, shelter, and other basic needs. Only a concerted effort to ensure access to jobs that pay a living wage, adequate support for those who cannot work, affordable housing to the poor and deprived persons, and access to adequate healthcare, will bring an end to homelessness, thereby providing an enduring and livable urban environment in our cities.

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