

TITLE:

MAKING PARADISE

FROM SLUMS

ABSTRACT

Our lives begin to end the day we keep silent about issues that are germane to our continued existence as a people. Thankfully, this essay affords me the opportunity to push my pen for some issues hovering around my existence as a student. Having been brought up in the slums of Lagos, Nigeria, I was moved by sheer envy and plain cynicism when a friend of mine who based in Paris sent pictures of some streets of Paris to me via the internet. I engaged myself in needless comparison of the streets of Paris with the streets of the city where I have spent over two decades of my existence. However, as a product of a society where slums have become my only available shelter, where people show apathy to the living conditions threatening their existence and where those at the helms of power are only concern with the seat of government house; I can adjudge that living in slums can be likened to living in hell. This was what triggered my curiosity on the theme of this essay which centers on the proposition of means by which a city embellished with slums can be developed into a city of desired standard. The approaches to achieving this as contained in this essay are practical-based and result-oriented. The challenges that may be encountered are not treated with scant regard some of which include: exponential growth rate of population in an urban city, abyss of penury, pollution as threat to human health, infrastructure break-down, as well as violence tendencies. Nonetheless, some of the examined mechanisms for combating the challenges are: the pivotal role of government with enviable leadership traits, the place of corporate social responsibilities of corporate organizations, public-private sector partnership, enforceable environmental legislatures as well as the passionate role of relevant None Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and individuals.

The methodology adopted is that the examination is done in such a way that the mechanisms seek fundamental solutions that are necessary for even development of a slum-embellished city rather than going for routines. Besides, the proposed mechanisms are presented with slight reference to some great cities in the developed countries. Good road networks, pollution-free environment, unwavering healthcare delivery, sustainable infrastructure development and violence-free society are some of the features that characterized these cities.

The major significant derivable conclusion of this essay is that with strict adherence to the recommendations and suggested mechanisms therein, a city of desired taste or standard can be developed with recourse to its master-plan.

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1. Introduction

Having been brought up in the slums of Lagos, Nigeria, I was moved by sheer envy and plain cynicism against the government of my country when a friend of mine who based in Paris sent pictures of some streets of Paris to me via the internet. I engaged myself in needless criticism against the government for the non-salubrious state of the city I reside in without regard to my influence as component of the city. Until I gained admission into the university where I was compelled to live in semi-slum environment-the best available. It was at that point I realized the importance of my role as an individual, government and corporate organizations in making a paradise from the slums we live in. Perhaps the above assertion may look like a tall dream that is far from being realized, but the objective of this essay is to provide ways and mechanisms through which the dream can metamorphose into its physical equivalence. However, challenges militating against the economic progress of a slum-like city are not treated with scant regard. Such challenges include: unbearably high rate of rural-urban migration, infrastructure break-down, ethnical and religious crises, upsurge in poverty level, as well as pollution ranging from air, water to land pollution with air pollution being the greatest enemy to human survival. But barring all these limitations is then the dream city, the one that can be likened to paradise!

2. What is a City?

With no single generally acceptable definition of a city, geographers have tried to convince us that a city is the central meeting point for the power and culture of a group of people with diverse cultural orientation and beliefs. It is a place where diverse beliefs come into one focus with gains in both social effectiveness and significance. Further more, a city is an emblem of integrated social relationship. It is the ‘engine room’ of the economy, the hall of justice, the academy of learning. It is also characterize with good governance, good healthcare structure, sustainable economic growth and development alongside unrestricted access to economic opportunities. From the foregoing, it can be said that a city arises out of man’s social needs¹. Therefore, a city remains man’s greatest work of art².

3. My Dream City

Having found myself in a developing nation where all sorts of social vices, environmental degradation and poor healthcare services characterize my upbringing, I braced up to contribute my quota in reshaping the city where I live in to my dream city. My dream city is one with salubrious environment,

¹ Donald L. Miller. “The Culture of Cities”, Lewis Mymford Reader ed. Panthem Books, New York (1986)

² Donald L. Miller. “The Culture of Cities”, Lewis Mymford Reader ed. Panthem Books, New York (1986)

one with well planned road networks, one with health-friendly atmosphere. Such city of my dream is characterize with controlled immigration and emigration rates, good healthcare delivery, readily available employment opportunities and unrestricted market access, standard social amenities as well as excellent leadership. Besides, the following are also essential parts of my dream city: high standard of living which is consequent of increase in Gross Domestic Product, violence-free, standard academy of learning and mutual co-existence of the people that reside in the city.

4. Any Opportunity in a City Embellished With Slums?

Oasis is an area in the desert where there is water and trees grow. What this means is that an agriculturally barren land can still play host to growing plants. This proverbial illustration can be likened to a city where majority of its residents dwell in slums. The opportunities therein in this kind of city cannot be discarded with a wave of the hand. Being an industrialized setting, there is better access to employment opportunities and other economic advantages such as social investment, entrepreneurship ideals and economic innovations that are technologically-driven. All these positive sides make such city to be the economic ‘engine room’ of a macro-community. Besides, with the influx of people migrating from the rural areas to the city in search of greener pasture, then the effect of the multiplying population of the city can be advantageous in terms of stronger defense to safeguard the city against any physical attack from neighboring communities. This actually will depend on a number of factors ranging from the state of the city’s arsenal to its technical know-how.

5. The Challenges

With uncontrolled migration rate, the population of a city will continue to follow exponential growth pattern rather than being linear. The difference between linear growth and exponential growth is the classical theory by Malthus (1798). His hypothesis was that unchecked population would increase in geometric progression while the means of subsistence would increase in an arithmetic progression. As a result, there would be overcrowding, hence, population would expand to the limit of subsistence and be held thereafter by war, famine and ill health.

Infrastructure break-down is another major challenge hindering the social development of a city characterized with slums. This dysfunction of basic social amenities is consequent of poor maintenance on the part of the providers and risible cum inconsiderate utilization on the part of the users. That means both the providers which can be government, corporate organizations or individuals and the users are partners in infrastructure destruction.

Substantial part of the population of a developing city is living in abyss of penury. This is not unconnected from the fact that a developing city is overcrowded which then give rise to unbearably higher number of people in the league of job seeking than the available jobs. Hence, idleness and high level of poverty pervade the city. Another major challenge of a developing city is its violence tendencies. The crises can be politically instigated, religiously incited and ethnically fuelled. In all, a developing city is prone to crises with high level of destruction of lives and property.

Pollution is the greatest threat to human survival. A developing city cannot be completely rid of pollution which includes: air, water and land pollution. This is not unconnected from the fact that a developing city is also industrialized. Water-borne diseases can be contacted through contaminated water with heavy industrial chemical wastes. Oil spillage and indiscriminate dumping of refuse pollute land which can constitute road blocks, destroy farmlands and subject the environment to malodorous odor. With more and more Green House Gases being released into the atmosphere, the ozone layer is continuously being depleted and the air we breathe in is also being polluted. This has a high tendency of causing respiratory problems. Besides, in one of the courses I have studied in the university, I was taught how different industries contribute to accident through pollution by knowing their Fatal Accident Frequency Rate (FAFR)³ as indicated in table 1 below.

| Occupation | FAFR | Occupation | FAFR |
|--------------------------|-------------|---------------------|-------------|
| Chemical industry | 3.5 | Air crew | 250 |
| British industry average | 4.0 | Professional boxers | 7000 |
| Steel industry | 8.0 | Staying at home | 3.0 |
| Fishing | 3.5 | Traveling by bus | 3.0 |
| Railway saunters | 4.5 | Traveling by train | 5.0 |
| Construction workers | 6.7 | Traveling by car | 57.0 |
| Coal mining | 4.0 | Pedal cycling | 96.0 |

Table 1. FAFR of Typical Activities⁴.

³ FAFR is defined as the risk to life in 10^8 exposed hours. This is equivalent to the number of fatalities occurring among 1000 men over the working life (assumed to be 33 years of working for 320 days per year and 10 hours per day).

⁴ Kletz T.A. "Hazard Analysis-a Quantitative Approach to Safety". Institution of Chemical Engineers Symposium Series No 34, London (1971).

Generally, pollution subjects a city to environmental degradation.

6. Pragmatic Approaches to Reshape the City

The following approaches to reshape a city to desired standard are presented in such a way that they are practical-based and result-oriented with recourse to relevant case studies as references.

6.1. Excellent Leadership

Show me a developed city and I will tell you of its vision-driven with zero tolerance for corruption. For a city to thrive, the place of good leadership cannot be treated with scant regard. From what I discovered, a city with bad leaders cannot witness economic growth and development. Therefore, a city that is aimed at being developed should be garnished with excellent leaders embellished with passion for knowledge, servant-hood, strength of character, discipline and value-centered. As institutional builders, good leaders produce strength in diversity. They deploy the potential of everyone towards the goal of developing the city. Besides, where do you think John Kennedy (USA), Nelson Mandela (South Africa), Abraham Lincoln and among others were made from? The essence of their excellent ideals did not come from birth but from the crucibles of life came their glowing character and strength for living.

6.2. The Place of Corporate Social Responsibility

As components of a slum-embellished city that is aimed at being upgraded to a city of enviable standard, corporate organizations have central role to play. The fact that the city that play host to them is in dire need of their support cannot be disregarded. Corporate organizations should learn to give back to their host city by enhancing their social responsibilities in such a way that it will not undermine their profits. They can be of help in collaboration with international organizations such United Nations Education, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in the provision of standard teaching or learning facilities to already existing public schools in slum areas, build lecture rooms, provide adequately stocked libraries and computer systems, scholarship awards to indigent students and academically sound students. Corporate organizations can also be highly functional in endowment programs for public schools in slum areas and give research grants to lecturers. Undoubtedly, with all these, the standard of the academy of learning can be enhanced to world standard. Health sector can as well witness the supporting hand of corporate organizations in collaboration with some foreign agencies such United States Aid (USAID) and World Health Organization (WHO) through the provision of enhanced health

facilities. They can develop youth empowerment programs which will consequently enhance the human capacity building of youths. Such empowerment programs may include: seminars, talk shows, youth conferences among others. Corporate organizations can as well enhance their operations, thus giving more employment opportunities and market access thereby reducing the scourge of unemployment. Behold, the dream city is gradually emerging!

6.3. Public-Private Sector Partnership

There are developmental projects that need to be executed in slum areas of a city but they are too exorbitant for either the private sector or the public sector to single handedly handled. Signing of memorandum of understanding which seeks the partnership of both the private and public sectors will go along way in executing such projects, hence, transforming the physical and economic landscape of the city. Such projects are capital intensive which may include: establishment of schools, establishment of industries, construction of good roads and development of local industries as well as the provision of long term social amenities. However, all these should be in tandem with the master-plan of the city. Besides, the projects will not only enhance the economic viability of the city but will also put the city on the global economic scene. Hence, the global market needed for my dream city is ascertained! Paris (France), New York (USA) and Beijing (China) shared the same sentiments in this respect. The collaborative effort of both the private and public sectors played major role in putting these cities on the global economic scene.

6.4. Mutual Co-existence of People

The understanding of the residents of a city that is aimed at being transformed to enviable standard is the bedrock of any developmental process. In this regard, every individual has a role to play. People should learn how to live with one another in harmony irrespective of cultural background, beliefs and ideologies. It should give a cause for reflection that before a city can be adjudge standard city, it should be a symbol of integrated social relationship. In re-engineering the diverse orientation of people towards achieving a common goal, the mass media has a responsibility to discharge. The mass media in collaboration with community-based organizations can help in bringing the diffuse rays of many separate beams of understanding of people into a focus. This can be achieved through: continuous public campaign against violence, public enlightenment campaign against political, ethnic and religious crises as well as spontaneous mass education of people on the gains of peaceful co-existence. In this respect, government should create a friendly environment where everybody will see himself or herself as stakeholder. Behold, here comes the peace needed in my dream city! Analytical reports from Paris (France), New York (USA), Tokyo (Japan), and Beijing (China) revealed that none of these

cities have witness any form of crisis in the last ten years. This was attributed to the understanding of the people that reside in these cities.

6.5. Government, Championing the Course to Shape my Dream City

Of all the approaches discussed, the role of the government is the most important. The government can embark on environmental development with enforceable sanitation policies. Indiscriminate dumping of refuse should be prohibited through enactment of laws that sanctions the defaulters. However, government should first see that there is aggressive press campaign against such ill-environmental act. Besides, other environmental issues that need to be addressed are: the need for hard data on air quality, bush burning, vehicular emissions and the concerns of host cities about the risk of their lives due to the presence of industrial facilities. Nonetheless, the need to check population growth (a social policy issue) as well as to check the per capita energy consumption growth rate through appropriate technological innovations and energy policy is also very essential. In this regard, a maxim of environmental management applies: ‘Think Globally, Act Locally’⁵. The use of more refined technology by industries is central to reducing the scourge of pollution. However, the failure of central electricity generation and the use of so many pollution-prone standby generators should be redressed. Hence, there is need to enact national emissions source regulations with enforceable limits. In pursuance of this, the appropriate agencies should be strengthened and trained in anticipation. Thereafter, a health-friendly environment will be in view.

As a social policy issue, checking of population growth rate is as important as ever in changing the face of a city. The influx of people migrating from the rural areas to the cities will actually subject the population of the city to grow without specific pattern, thereby making the statistics and demographic analysis of the city non reliable. In order to have a city with controlled emigration and immigration rates, appropriate policies need to be made by the government. In achieving this, government machineries such as functional migration ministry with enhanced database and reliable registry of death and birth staffed with highly proficient demographers and statisticians need to be put in place.

The provision of basic social amenities is naturally the role of government. It is not the provision that matters but the sustainability which borders on maintenance. Such infrastructures may include: electricity, water, good transportation network, well grounded healthcare delivery and formidable housing scheme. In maintaining these facilities, the providers should work in collaboration with

⁵ Bajomo F.T. ‘An Holistic Approach to Environmental Management’, 2nd edition. Rainbow Books, Nigeria (1995)

community-based organizations to set up monitoring and maintenance group. This group will be educating the users about the careful use of the facilities and give reports containing details of the state of the facilities to the providers. With these recommendations, the facilities can serve for longer years thereby giving the city a befitting infrastructure standard. This will undoubtedly attract foreign and private investors. Now it remains a step to fully shape the dream city!

6.6. The Role of NGOs

NGOs can work in collaboration with community-based organizations with the help of corporate organizations to embark on youth empowerment programs, aggressive mass education of people on how to live with understanding as well as formation of grassroots organizations aim at nurturing the mindset of young people towards the development of the city they live in. Here comes the dream city, the paradise!

7. My Role and What I Have Done

I am at present, the president of the Association of Campus Journalists (ACJ) in my university and national coordinator of the Youths Ambassadors for Development Embassy (YADE)-an NGO which I founded in my first year in the university. For long, I have always been a crusader of development. As president of ACJ, I work in collaboration with 'THE NATION'-a Nigerian national daily, alongside my colleagues to write features on some of the projects some corporate organizations have executed in Nigerian campuses. We aptly called them (corporate organizations) the 'Deans of Nigerian Campuses' and our aim was to encourage them and call their attentions to other neglected areas where they can come in. Thank God we were able to achieve this. Besides, I have taken time to browse through the internet, make rigorous enquiries in order to know whether such thing has been done in other places. I am proud to say that it is the first of its kind in the whole of black Africa; hence it is an innovative idea. With what we have done, several other corporate organizations who also want their names in the good book of history have also taken the bull by the horns to lend their helping hands. These organizations have actually focused on the neglected areas mentioned in the newspaper. Such areas include building more lecture rooms to cater for the multiplying population of students, establishment of business schools and financial endowment programs. Some Nigerian banks have actually taken up the gauntlet.

YADE has seven board members that cut across seven Nigerian universities with respective university having membership ranging from 50 to 100 students. What we have done in the past was to organize

talk shows and seminars as our own way of enhancing the human capacity building of Nigerian youths especially those in the university. With these empowerment programs, we have been able to produce about 15 student entrepreneurs across the seven campuses. This we considered to be our social responsibility. We are currently running a project tagged 'Keep the Campus Clean' in the seven universities. Through the help of funds raised from our pockets, we have been able to procure waste baskets in a bid to actualize this project. We have embarked on press campaign in collaboration with ACJ as we believe that information empowers the mind, if you are informed, you will be deformed. We have been able to educate people on the need to keep our environment clean. We informed them about Beijing, Tokyo and showed them pictures of some streets of Paris. We pointed that our own city can also be like Paris, Tokyo and Beijing. We declared that these cities were not from heaven, they were made! Thankfully, our campaign has actually yielded some positive results. Students now feel reluctant to dump waste indiscriminately; the waste baskets are being carefully utilized. With just four months into the project, I dare say that the level of neatness of these seven campuses can be likened to any campus in Paris and other developed cities.

8. Improving the Impact of My Work

With the encouraging result I have gotten so far, I hope to extend the tentacles of these developmental projects to the city at large. I intend to achieve this loft goal by collaborating with other NGOs, private sectors, government as well as almost all the Nigerian national dailies and some international organizations such as World Bank, United Nations among others. The tag 'keep the Campus Clean' will thereafter becomes 'Keep the City Clean'. We also hope to embark on large scale empowerment programs for people in order to instill the ideals of entrepreneurship in the minds of people. By doing so, we hope that more employers of labor will be produced. Other youths can also take up the gauntlet as I have done. They can start from their campuses or streets and then take it beyond that level as I am also hoping. Together we can make paradise from the slums we live in, it is possible!

9. Conclusion

Can anything good come out from Nazareth? But Jesus Christ came out from Nazareth. However, it took some processes that are better appreciated in the bible before Jesus could emerge from the city. He eventually became the progenitor of Christian faith. The same scenario applies to the slums I live in. can a paradise be made from the slums? Yes, it only involves some processes and time as cities are sometimes described as product of time. The processes have been painstakingly highlighted in this

essay. Albeit, majority of the ideas are based on personal experience peculiar to Nigerian cities but with little or no modifications, it can still be applied in other places. Who says it is not possible to make paradise from slums? Honestly, it is possible!

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