THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON RESIDENTS LIVING CONDITIONS IN LAGOS, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The outbreak of Coronavirus in Lagos, Nigeria has been faced with continuous and high rise spread since its first recorded case on 27th February, 2020 and this figure has skyrocketed to 14,636 infections in Lagos, Nigeria on the 28th of July, 2020. This study investigated the cause, prevalent rise and challenges posed on Lagos residents. The study adopted reviews from existing literature, working paper, worldometer, it was discovered that overcrowding contributed to the high spread of the virus in the study area, the prevalent rise in infections were mainly from Lagos Mainland, the living conditions revealed that there are poor and insufficient housing facilities, therefore, there is an urgent need for physical planning and regulations, provision of adequate planned spaces to manage urban growth in preventing the spread of the virus within the crowded population.

Keywords: Covid-19, Impact, Living conditions, Residents

Introduction

Housing has no common definition, but generally can be referred to as shelter or lodging for human habitation. Housing / shelter is next to food and clothing. According to Oluwande (1983), a house is the physical structure which human beings use for shelter. Housing is beyond the four walls or just a mere shelter provision to protect from the various elements of weather and climate (Agbola and Kassim, 2007). Housing was also viewed as a real estate or its part in the building, including non-residential within a building but used as a dwelling purposes all year round (Sidejska, 2014). Therefore housing is viewed as a basket of goods which includes the physical structure itself, the dependent facilities and services within and around the building (Bourne 1984). Housing is the creation of life in a special environment in which people live and grow (Clois and Joan, 1996). Another writer Igwe (1987) argued that a home (housing) represents an extended formative years of a child’s physical, psychological, educational and emotional development. This totality and various view expressed about housing gives a clear dimensions of the term housing. First it can be (i) a social dimension (ii) an economic dimension (iii) a physiological/ health dimension. In developing countries, poor housing delivery has been attributed to inadequate mechanisms and systems for land allocation, funding, mortgage institutions and infrastructure (Encarta, 2007). Housing is a vital social determinant of health, COVID-19, and the actions taken to mitigate its spread, depicts the importance home plays in people’s lives (Claire, 2020). The Lockdown mandated people to stay at home.

These unprecedented restrictions as brought about diverse perceptions to which people think or see their homes. Despite the significance of becoming a norm, and the discrepancy in housing need and supply is high. The announcement of the dreaded Coronavirus (COVID-19) on December 2019 from the epicenter – Wuhan in China and its spread beyond national and continental borders had been followed with partial or total lockdown of nations. The tool “lockdown” has been used to curtail the intermittent spread of the virus hence has affected businesses across the globe. Factories, offices, schools, and even religious buildings are forced to close, leaving only essential services to operate as the world battles to combat the new Coronavirus, hence the home has been encouraged to be the most active response to the checking of its spread, a shield and stopping of the disease.

This primary objective of this study is to review the living condition of residents in Lagos, Nigeria, the causes of the prevalent rise in COVID-19 infections and residents living conditions.
COVID – 19 pandemic and Housing

As the world trend on the outbreak of Covid-19 which emanated between December (2019) and January (2020) in Asia- China- Wuhan as its first wave, and a continuum in Europe, America and Africa till date. This has caused in a tremendous fear in Africa as cases keeps surging daily exponentially. Currently, 46 out of 47 World Health Organisation member states from the 56 African countries have over 335,791 confirmed cases of COVID-19 (AbdulAzeez,2020). However, the Covid-19 spread across 114 countries before WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on 11th March, 2020 declared the spread as a pandemic. In Africa, there are confirmed cases of Covid-19. However, Egypt recorded its first case on 14th February, 2020, followed by Algeria on the 25th February, 2020. Nigeria recoded her index case on the 27th February, 2020 (NCDC, 2020). A case of an Italian citizen who works in Nigeria and returned from Milan, Italy to Lagos Nigeria on the 25th of February,2020, an interesting case was that of a Nigerian who returned into the country from the United Kingdom on the 17th March , 2020. On return to the country from United Kingdom, the case did a self isolation at home and later developed some symptoms. Officials from the Lagos state Covid-19 emergency operations were dispatched to collect samples. The case tested positive for Covid-19 and contact tracing began, and currently Nigeria has 22, 614 cases of Covid-19 (Africa News, 2020).

Currently evidences have shown that Covid-19 is transmitted primarily between people via respiratory droplets and contact routes. Droplet transmission occurs when a person is in close contact (within 1metre) with an infected person or exposure to potentially infective transmission which can be as a result of coughing, sneezing, yarning or very close contact with infected persons resulting in absorption or inoculation either by nose, mouth, eyes of such infected droplets by the next individual, such transmission can also occur directly or indirectly with surfaces or objects an infected person might have come in contact with. In the absence of any official drug from the WHO, it has been envisaged and of forceful compliance of the order ‘stay at home’ which has been described as social distancing and isolation has been enforced by various government across the nations of the world to reduce the spread of the deadly virus. This will go a long way to ‘flatten the curve’ of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Housing is the major place where COVID-19 is experienced (Garber, 2020). Therefore to maintain social distancing within the home is very difficult. Quarantining and self-isolating people in their homes (Hang, 2020). Restricting people in their homes serves as ways of saving people from exposure to the virus. Whereas people experiencing homelessness or those who sleep arbitrarily in open spaces, slums, the idea of “stay at home” order, isolation, quarantining is unrealistic because of the absence of private dwelling, many at times not an option. And such can lead to greater exposure to COVID-19, also greater risk of contact with authorities who placed strict compliance on the lock-down order arising from the close down of public offices and space. The United Nation’s sustainable goals or SDG’s are blue prints for achieving a better and more sustainable future and resilient cities, for the planet and its inhabitants (Ian, 2019). Availability of a safe and secure home for an individual, group or family, which exists in perpetuity, indicates the root of poverty (SDG 1- No Poverty). Whereas a vaccine can cure illness, a decent home can reduce the spread of disease (SDG 3- Good Health and Wellbeing).

The right to housing is recognized in national constitutions of Nigeria and in the year 1976 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 25) states that: “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control” after a sufficient number of countries had ratified them including Nigeria. In answer to the fundamental human right that says everyone has the right to adequate standard of living in line to this the federal government of Nigeria has provided in the constitution and considering the fact the right is non-justifiable, makes it difficult to say that there is legal right to housing such that would warrant a demand by the citizens on the government to fulfill this housing right. Hence section 16(2) (d) of the constitution provides as follows: The state shall direct its policy towards ensuring that suitable and adequate shelter suitable and adequate food, reasonable national minimum living wage, old age care and pensions, and unemployment, sick benefits and welfare of the disabled are provided for all citizen. This constitution founded the justifiable right and also had influenced the government past policies and delivery in the nation over time. Nigeria’s socio-economic policies on shelter, encompasses deliberate guidelines and principles formulated and implemented to guide in strategic planning for housing sector. Thus the two major components of the governments intervention towards adequate and suitable shelter has been targeted towards affordability, availability and empowering of the private sector towards the development of housing and provision of housing for all.
Concept of housing delivery in Nigeria

Prior to the year 1980, the Federal Housing Authority was promulgated, Decree No. 40 of 1973 and began formal operation in the year 1976 (Junadu, 2007) FHA has been the main public organ in the provision of housing in Nigeria. And a first attempt was during the all African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC), Ipaja town, the Amuwo odofin phase1 Estate in Lagos and was the first attempt ever provision of low cost housing Estate in the eleven states capital. This was the first attempt and effort in provision of affordable housing to Nigerian citizens.

In the year 1980- 1989 the then federal government proposed the first 1981/ 1982 National Housing Programmes target to provide and deliver 350 medium and high housing income units in each of the then 19 states of the federation by the Federal Housing Authority which was made after an addition to the then Shagari low cost housing. The government then proposed 40,000 housing units to be constructed across the federation with an annually delivery of 2000 units per state including the Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory. A total of 200,000 houses were expected to be delivered from the year 1981 and 1985 but only 47, 500 were made available (Jinadu, 2007).

In the year 1991 National Housing Policy which succeeded the 1981/1982 National Housing Programme was the first comprehensive response by the government solely for the purpose of solving housing problems in Nigeria. The aim of the National Housing policy 1991 was to ensure that all Nigerians own or have access to decent housing accommodation at affordable cost by the year 2000 A.D (Ogunrayewa and Madaki, 1999). And the policy was to ensure that there is access to decent housing accommodation by addressing the fundamental issues relating to the difficulty of access such as, land acquisition (subjected to the Land Use Act), housing finance, housing construction and housing delivery by establishing the National Housing fund scheme, scheme to mobilize loanable funds from workers, through the Primary mortgage Institutions (PMI) and the Federal Mortgage bank of Nigeria to also provide loan for housing research, construction and delivery. Hence the policy eased difficulties encountered by citizens with respect to the operations of the Land Use Act as it affects land ownership, and as well as meet the need of Nigerians for qualitative housing through mortgage finance.

The 2002 policy of Housing and Urban Development Policy later resulted into the Nigerian National Housing Policy of the year 2006. The policy later focused on institutionalization and increased financial mobilization to the housing sector, use of local building material and access to equitable land acquisition. The policy also encouraged private sectors to establish primary mortgage institutions and cooperating with all tiers of government in availability of funds for housing development. The 2012 Housing Policy was formulated to replace the thrust of the old housing policies and particularly, the 2006 National Housing Policy. The target of the 2012 National Housing Policy was to make housing available for every Nigerian regardless of their financial status, the view of housing to be seen as a social norm hence, providing houses for the low-income earners by developing low cost housing and such was solely the responsibility of the government to provide for houses and also aimed at providing a million housing unit annually. It placed emphasis on the private sector and government as regulator for a sustainable development of the sector that is a collaborative approach towards housing development in the nation. However, the 2012 National Housing Policy with its laudable programmes and strategies, remained so on paper as it has not yet yielded it practical actualization to an average or common Nigerian.

The Challenge Of Covid-19 And Residential Housing

The Nigerian government has adopted several strategies to cushion the spread of Covid-19, despite improving macroeconomics, housing remains a perennial problem in Nigeria. At a population estimated at 206,139,589 people at midyear 2020 according to UN data (worlddometre Live, 2020) and a projected population of 263 million by 2038 (CAHF,2019), the housing situation in Nigeria calls for an emergency response. The Vice-President, Prof. Yemi Osinbajo, speaking on the development, at the Housing Summit held in Abuja, lamented that the country’s housing deficit was too high, stating that although no nation had been able to provide all the housing needs of its citizens, the housing crisis in developing countries, including Nigeria was very bad. He maintained that it was obvious that the deficit in housing requirement was unacceptably high despite various policies and strategies adopted by the federal government to combat the housing problems of the citizenry and not much had been accomplished, emphasizing that the major problem that stood against the delivery of adequate housing in the country was the challenge with land ownership. Thus, there is a need for an urgent solution of adequate and affordable housing supply and delivery in Nigeria. How Nigeria will overcome the housing deficit has been a source of concern especially what deliverables will be adequate and affordable for the urban poor as they are disproportionately negatively affected. That is, Lagos city is a case in point as it serves as the epicenter of the effect of the COVID-19 scourge in Nigeria. A large number of residents of Lagos are poor and are accommodated in slum area, squatter settlements, shanty towns and degraded environments, their lives
are not safe. Housing conditions are very poor and there are overcrowding, leading to multiple vulnerabilities and limited ownership to physical properties as dwelling place. For example in a research by Oluwafemi O.(2020) found that about 80% of the residents of Sari-Iganmu area of Lagos, live in one room with an average of seven people. An average of seven households share toilet and bathroom facilities with no running water. An household is defined as the total number of people living together, eating from the same pot, staying together and dwelling as a separate unit for the purpose of a home. Till date, Lagos has the highest number of COVID-19 cases in the country, according to the list issued on May 10th, 2020 (Lagos Mainland has the highest number of cases, Alimosho, Oshodi, Mushin, Ikeja, Kosofe and Isolo LGA also have increased cases and are still on the rise daily (Vanguard News, 2020).

Fig. 1: Confirmed cases by LGA

Source: Nigeria Centre for Disease Control 2020

Lagos has the highest number of COVID-19 cases in the country. According to the list released, Lagos Mainland has the highest number of infections. Alimosho, Oshodi, Mushin, Ikeja, Kosofe and Isolo LGA also have increased cases and are still on the rise daily. These areas are densely populated with, more than five person living in a room.

The residents suffer unacceptable level of hygiene and health, residents make use of overcrowded and stressed facilities inadequate water supply and electricity, while they also lack good proper garbage disposals facilities and good drainages, poor personal hygiene habits, and open defecation in ditches are widely practiced, while they also lack good proper garbage disposals facilities and good drainages, poor environment already causes diarrhoe, cough, malaria, cold and cough are existing, a triggered rise in COVID-19 infections increases the vulnerable population daily. Most residents especially of Lagos mainland from communities from Ijora Oloye, Ajegunle and Makoko have residential accommodation, those who do not have accommodation sleep in mosques, churches, while noting also that, others sleep in places such as market stalls, filling stations and motor parks. Meanwhile those that have accommodation live in one-room apartment, with an average of 5 people in a room, also occurring are those that have accommodation have over 6 individuals per room. Residents in these communities share amenities such as toilet, bathroom and kitchen (Akinwale, et al., 2019). However, overcrowding is one of the problems facing them and for such communities, inadequate shelter and overcrowding are major factors in the transmission of diseases with epidemic potential such as acute respiratory infections, meningitis, typhus, cholera, scabies, etc, accompanied with prevalent COVID-19 infections, these existing acute respiratory infections have triggered the frequencies of spread in a densely populated area.
Accruing from the several problems, associated with housing delivery and the need for ‘private dwelling’ arising from the scourge of the COVID-19 pandemic, Nigeria has not been able to meet up with the huge housing deficit put at over 17 and 20 million housing units (ThisDay, 2020). This is also a huge opportunity for progress in the housing sector. People living in cramped conditions and specific settings such as refugee camps, camp-like settings slums have more exposure to the COVID-19 infection. In Lagos, the need for housing is rising by about 20 percent a year. Current total output in the formal housing sector is estimated at no more than 100,000 units. While no good data exist, it is clear that the formal sector (private sector) which is facilitated by an increased means to livelihood, in terms of income distribution, ownership rates increase as total expenditure (rent, water, electricity and repairs) increases. Large numbers of rural households (81 percent) own their housing, but this is often ownership of an informal kind, and may be held collectively rather than individually. While some farmers rent land, very few rent a home. Whether rich or poor, most rural dwellers have some kind of access to “ownership.” The situation is different in cities, where there are higher percentage of households rent this means, an increase in migration and this rent is only producing a fraction of the total number of urban units needed each year. The UN estimates that by 2050, 75 percent of the world population will be living in cities. This will translate into an annual housing requirement over the coming decades of at least 700,000 units annually to address the 20 million housing deficit across the states of the federation just to keep up with growing population and urban migration.

There will be no return to the ‘old normal’ for the foreseeable future. But there is a roadmap to a situation where we can control COVID-19 and get on with our lives. No matter where a country is in its epidemic curve, it is never too late to take decisive action (Tedros, 2020). Self isolation is simply not possible in informal settlements. Those living in informal settlements often establish self support system as part of their coping strategies. In COVID-19 pandemic situation such support systems begin to unravel, coping strategies are part of the resilience of informal settlements. Urban resilience is defined as the capacity of individuals, communities,
institutions, businesses, and systems within a city to survive, adapt and grow no matter what kinds of chronic stresses and acute shocks they experience (Rockefeller Foundation , 2020). Also lack of awareness of the seriousness of the pandemic, coupled with poverty and superstition increased resistance to stay at home order, hence there is a need for professionals to respond, invent and develop alternatives to solving the challenges in housing deficit in immediate term by beating this virus

**Recommendations**

This study focused on Lagos and its prevalent daily rise in COVID-19 infections since it outbreak in February, 2020, Lagos, south western Nigeria. The growth of informal settlements as a result of housing deficit is essentially an urban problem. The pandemic has bought our unpreparedness in the face of the spatial demographic, housing, social, cultural, economic, residential living conditions, environmental challenges as well as the health issues facing the slum residents associated with urbanization, and such as informed decisions on the relevant interventions.

- Physical planning provides the framework for good urban governance, where all stakeholders are involved in the decision making process. People living in informal settlements constitute challenge as well as opportunity. Experience in waterfront settlements of Lagos shows that they are managed by Community Development associations. Use the CDAs to facilitate improvement in water supply, sanitation and waste management in the immediate term.

- Provide adequate and planned spaces for informal sector activities in urban areas.

- Manage urban growth and public space occupancy. Government and its agencies have not been in control of the growth dynamics in our urban centres. Order must be deliberately created in our urban centre for the immediate and long term future. The way to achieve this is in the context of implementing physical development plans.

- Ensure discipline and adherence to planning standards in land use decisions.

- Ensure implementation of affordable housing projects to suit for the medium and low income group of the population.

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