

# Revitalizing Africa's Blighted Urban Landscapes: A Case Study of Sustainable Development in Okokomaiko, Lagos, Nigeria

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## Abstract

## Original Research Article

One of the most critical challenges facing the physical environment of the Lagos metropolis is the rapid degradation of peri-urban communities, specifically Okokomaiko. This settlement is currently characterized by a lack of basic "ekistic" convenience—the balance between human settlement and nature. Observations indicate that inadequate urban services, infrastructure deficits, pervasive poverty, and environmental pollution act as significant impediments to the community's socio-economic development. While sustainable development remains a primary concern for governments, NGOs, and global stakeholders, this study reveals that the existing conditions in Okokomaiko are functionally unsustainable. However, this paper argues that through the application of appropriate urban planning methodologies, these negative impacts can be mitigated. The objective of this study is to enumerate strategies for improving environmental quality, transforming current urban challenges into opportunities for achieving a sustainable physical environment in Okokomaiko.

**Keywords:** Urban Sustainability, Physical Environment, Infrastructure Deficit, Peri-urbanization, Lagos.

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The need for sustainable development has been constantly stressed by many writers. In particular, this need has always been related to environmental and resource management before during and after the 2000 Rio conference on sustainable developments, the need has been a concern for and generated a lot of debate for example environmental development stake holders in Nigeria, both in television programme discussions and newspaper and journal articles. South to arouse sustained interest in the need for proceeding and the outcome of the conference.

According to Agboola (2004) the growth in population around affect the people through its

impact on economy, the environment, safety, health and the habitability of the world. Considering Lagos at the beginning of the 20th century the European business and political elite in the city invested in urban, water and sanitation infrastructure but, this was concerned in wealthy enclaves. As a result, the process of urbanization has given a lot of problems to the urban communities. Early effort to extend the infrastructure to poorer district were swiftly abandoned in the fall of rising lost and in front of a strategy of segregation (Nigeria common country assessment UNDP report, 2005).

The study of poverty in Africa, especially in Nigeria is a dynamic concept which as something to do with



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inequality and redistribution (Racelis, 1986) with reference to urban area like Okokomaiko Ekistics, it is inequality which Onibokun (1985) regards as urban dualism which common inequality in such things as urban services infrastructure facility housing, income economic opportunities, access to social services such as health, education and urban environmental quality. Okokomaiko for instance, observations have shown is characterized by a lot of problems like inadequate provision of urban services lack of infrastructure facilities, juxtaposition buildings and urban environmental problems.

It is therefore the purpose of this paper is to examine this scientifically neglected areas of research frontiers; the paper in particular examines the environmental problems in Okokomaiko area with the residents. The area has being chosen for two reasons first, it one of the oldest in the metropolis after Ojo town.

Secondly, it is one of the fastest growing areas with influence of populations migrating into the settlement and also the location of Alaba International market and international route leading to a neighbouring country. These implies that the environment will be pressured on its infrastructural facilities shortage of housing provisions, poor urban services which inform lead to poverty and environmental degradations. Therefore, the prospect for sustainable human development depends largely on the extent to which Nigeria succeeds in achieving the millennium development goals which has been set by the international community at the beginning of the millennium.

## 1. Introduction

The imperative for sustainable development has been a dominant theme in global discourse for decades. Historically rooted in environmental resource management discussions pre-dating the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, the concept has evolved through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and into the current 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs). This evolution has generated robust debate among environmental stakeholders in Nigeria, documented extensively in academic

literature and policy frameworks (Mabogunje, 2002; Osofsky, 2010).

According to Agboola (2004), unchecked population growth exerts profound pressure on the economy, environmental safety, public health, and general habitability. In the context of Lagos, the roots of these challenges can be traced to the early 20th century. During the colonial era, European business and political elites concentrated investments in urban planning, water, and sanitation infrastructure exclusively within wealthy enclaves. Consequently, the urbanization process in Lagos developed a fractured trajectory. Early efforts to extend infrastructure to poorer districts were frequently abandoned due to rising costs and a prevailing strategy of socio-spatial segregation (UNDP, 2005; Gandy, 2006).

Poverty in Africa, and particularly in Nigeria, is a dynamic concept inextricably linked to inequality and redistribution (Racelis, 1986). In peri-urban settlements like Okokomaiko, this manifests as what Onibokun (1985) describes as "urban dualism"—a stark inequality in access to housing, economic opportunities, and social services such as health and education. Okokomaiko is characterized by the juxtaposition of haphazard building structures, severe infrastructure deficits, and environmental degradation, creating a "blighted" urban landscape.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem and Justification

This paper aims to examine this often scientifically neglected frontier of urban research. Okokomaiko was selected as a case study for two primary reasons:

**Historical Significance:** It is one of the oldest settlements in the metropolis, second only to Ojo town in the local hierarchy.

**Rapid Urbanization and Economic Pressure:** It serves as a high-density migration node, heavily influenced by the location of the Alaba International Market—the largest electronics market in West Africa—and its position on the Badagry Expressway, a key international route to the Republic of Benin.

These factors imply that the local environment is under immense pressure. The resulting shortage of

housing, poor urban services, and high population density have accelerated environmental degradation. Therefore, the prospect for sustainable human development in this region depends largely on Nigeria's success in localizing global sustainability targets. By moving beyond the legacy of the MDGs and embracing the holistic approach of the SDGs (specifically Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities), stakeholders can address the blighted landscape of Okokomaiko.

## 2. Study Area: Okokomaiko

### 2.1. Geographical Location and Boundaries

The Okokomaiko settlement is strategically situated within the Ojo Local Government Area of Lagos State. It lies along the Lagos-Badagry Expressway, a major West African transnational corridor that connects Nigeria to the Republic of Benin. This expressway delineates the settlement's southern boundary. Geographically, Okokomaiko is bounded to the north by the expanding frontiers of Iba and Igbo-Elerin; to the south by the Ojo Military Cantonment across the expressway; to the east by the Iyano-Iba axis; and to the west by Ajangbadi.

A dominant physical feature of the area is a longitudinal ridge running along the east-west axis, which historically influenced early settlement patterns. Additionally, the settlement is heavily influenced by the Alaba International Market, located directly to the northwest. As the largest electronics market in West Africa, Alaba acts as a massive commercial magnet, driving population influx and spatial expansion (Olukoju, 2004).

### 2.2. Historical Background

The origins of Okokomaiko are rooted in the migration of Yoruba settlers from Ile-Ife during the early 1930s. Oral history suggests these founding fathers were hunters who, guided by the Ifa oracle, sought a propitious location for settlement. Upon discovering the fertile lands of the current site, they transitioned from hunting to agrarian activities, which formed the economic backbone of the early community.

The etymology of "Okokomaiko" is derived from the phrase "Oko-baba-ma-iko" (roughly translating to "The father does not reject" or "The farm that never rejects anyone"), reflecting the welcoming nature of the founding patriarch. Over decades, as the original settlers passed on and their descendants assumed leadership, the name evolved into "Okokomaiko," now a household name in the Lagos metropolis signifying a bustling, high-density peri-urban hub.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Research Design and Data Collection

To achieve the study's objectives, a mixed-methods research design was employed, integrating quantitative surveys with qualitative field assessments. The primary methods included:

**Field Observations:** Direct physical surveys to map infrastructure deficits, drainage conditions, and building typology.

**Key Informant Interviews:** Targeted discussions with diverse stakeholder groups, including market traders, transport workers, apprentices, service providers, and community leaders.

**Photographic Documentation:** Visual evidence was collected to corroborate data on environmental degradation.

### 3.2. Sampling Strategy

A stratified random sampling technique was used to administer structured questionnaires to a sample size of 100 respondents. The study area was divided into six administrative wards (A–F) to ensure spatial representation.

**Stratification:** The distribution of questionnaires was weighted based on population density and spatial size. Wards A and D, being the largest and most densely populated, received a higher proportion of the sample.

**Ward B:** Although smaller geographically, Ward B was identified during the pilot survey as having a unique demographic—less density but higher diversity in education and ethnic background—

warranting specific focus to capture varied perspectives.

Minimum Threshold: A minimum of 15 questionnaires was maintained for smaller wards to ensure statistical validity.

### 3.3. Measurement Scales

Respondents assessed environmental variables and social facility needs using a 5-point Likert scale. This allowed for the quantification of resident satisfaction levels.

**Table 1: Assessment Scales for Environmental Quality and Needs.**

Rating	Score	Perception of Services (e.g., Sewage)	Perception of Need (e.g., Social Facilities)
5	5	Excellent	Very Strong Need
4	4	Very Good	Strongly Needed
3	3	Good	Indifferent
2	2	Fair	Can do without
1	1	Poor	Not needed
0	0	Very Poor	—

**Table 2: Status of Environmental Conditions**

Items	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	Very poor	Total
General site condition					20	80	100
Recreation/ open space						20	20
Canteen						30	30
Public toilet						-	-
Electricity Supply			10	30		60	100
Potable water supply						20	20
Accessibility to site				10	40	50	100

Items	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	Very poor	Total
Traffic pattern and flow					50	50	100
Drainage system					20	50	70

Waste disposal					50	50	100
Condition of roads					50	50	100
The site of neighborhood					20	80	100

Here is the redrafted, expanded, and structurally polished section of the research paper. I have integrated a Comparative Analysis within the sections to anchor the local findings in the broader global context of urban studies. I have also inserted strategic image tags to enhance understanding of the physical layout and theoretical concepts.

#### 4. Analysis of Infrastructural Deficits and Utility Collapse

##### 4.1. The Water Supply Paradox

A critical paradox exists within the Okokomaiko settlement regarding potable water access. Despite the physical proximity of the Lagos State Water Corporation’s operational department—located merely a few kilometers from the settlement—the community lacks a functional public water supply network. Field investigations reveal that while reticulation pipes exist within the Ojo Local Government Area, they remain dry due to systemic maintenance failures and a lack of institutional sustainability.

**Currently, the primary sources of water are:**

- 1. Untreated Groundwater:** Private boreholes and wells, which are susceptible to contamination due to the high water table and poor sanitation.
- 2. Institutional Intervention:** The Army Water Scheme (Ojo Cantonment) provides limited relief.
- 3. Informal Vendors:** Residents rely heavily on "Mairuwa" (water cart pushers), a costly alternative typical of Lagosian peri-urbanism.

##### Comparative Analysis:

This situation mirrors findings by Gandy (2006) regarding the "bacteriological city," where the breakdown of colonial-era infrastructure in Lagos forces the poor to pay up to ten times more for water

than residents in affluent areas. Similarly, studies of Kibera in Nairobi (Amis, 2004) demonstrate how the absence of state-provided water creates predatory water cartels, a trend increasingly visible in Okokomaiko.

##### 4.2. Energy Poverty and "Epileptic" Power

The influx of migrants into the settlement has overwhelmed the existing electrical infrastructure. Power supply is characterized as "epileptic"-erratic and unreliable. The distribution companies have instituted a rigid load-shedding schedule (typically two days on, one day off) as a strategic option to prevent total transformer blowout. However, this rationing is insufficient to support the area's growing commercial needs, forcing businesses to rely on gasoline generators, which further contribute to noise and air pollution.

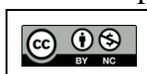
#### 5. Housing and Environmental Sanitation

##### 5.1. Housing Conditions

The housing stock in Okokomaiko is largely substandard, characterized by poor ventilation, high occupancy ratios, and structural defects. A significant portion of the commercial food sector operates in makeshift structures. Restaurants often prepare and serve food in open, unhygienic environments, adjacent to uncompleted buildings that double as refuse dumps.

##### Sanitation Crisis:

The absence of public toilets is a glaring deficiency. Consequently, open defecation and the use of "shot-put" methods (disposing of waste in polythene bags) are prevalent. This aligns with UN-Habitat’s (2003) definition of slums, where lack of sanitation is a primary indicator of urban blight.



## 5.2. Socio-Economic Dynamics and Security Challenges

Consistent with "Broken Windows Theory" (Wilson & Kelling, 1982), the physical degradation of Okokomaiko has fostered social disorder. The area, particularly around the Volks (Volkswagen) and Alaba Rago axis, has become a haven for criminal activities.

**Crime:** Security operatives report that the labyrinthine layout of the slum provides cover for miscreants. Robberies are frequent along the expressway.

**Prostitution:** The Alaba Rago market serves as a hub for commercial sex work, driven by the economic desperation of the inhabitants.

**The Working Poor:** The demographic consists largely of Alaba International Market traders and apprentices-those at the base of the socio-economic ladder. Their lack of regular income traps them in this degrading environment, creating a cycle of poverty.

## 6. Infrastructure and Drainage System Failure

### 6.1. Transport Network Collapse

The road network in Okokomaiko is subjected to loads for which it was not designed. Heavy-duty lorries and luxury buses, diverting from the dilapidated Badagry Expressway, traverse neighborhood roads such as Igbo-Elerin, PPL Road, and Iba Road. This diversion has caused total pavement failure. Even the nine main access roads serving the residential precincts are in a state of disrepair, creating a nightmarish commute for residents.

### 6.2. Drainage and Flooding

The drainage system is in a state of shambles. Natural water paths and engineered drainage chambers have been blocked by:

**1. Illegal Construction:** Structures erected directly on drainage alignments (Right of Way), particularly along the Alaba Rago-Ojo link road.

**2. Solid Waste:** The indiscriminate dumping of refuse into open sewers.

This blockage results in severe flash floods during the rainy season. This phenomenon is not unique to Lagos; Douglas (2008) notes similar issues in Jakarta and Manila, where uncontrolled peri-urban growth outpaces the capacity of drainage infrastructure, leading to "man-made" flood disasters.

**7. Theoretical Framework:** Environment and Sustainability

### 7.1. Conceptualizing the Environment

To contextualize the findings, we must define the "environment" beyond its physical attributes. Lecomber (1975) argues that the environment is vague and cannot be reduced to a single metric. However, Kadiri (1990) and Rau & Morkem (1980) categorize it into three interactive spheres relevant to this study:

**1. The Physical Environment:** Natural and built elements (land, air, water, infrastructure).

**2. The Social Environment:** Community interaction, cultural values, and public services.

**3. The Aesthetic Environment:** Visual quality and architectural character.

Onibokun (2006) further operationalizes this by viewing environmental planning as a translation of principles into action. He argues that urban environmental problems are multi-dimensional and require a "bottom-up" approach involving all stakeholders.

### 7.2. The Imperative of Sustainable Development

The concept of sustainable development, popularized by the Brundtland Commission (1987), advocates for meeting present needs without compromising the future. However, in Okokomaiko, this balance is non-existent. The current trajectory is one of resource depletion and environmental degradation.

Koinyan (1990) defines development as the realization of human potential. Yet, the residents of Okokomaiko are trapped in a survivalist mode, where environmental quality is sacrificed for immediate economic subsistence.

The sustainability gap in Okokomaiko is evident in the "indirect contributions" of the environment to quality of life. As noted by the UICH (1991), poor environments contribute to stress and ill health. The traffic congestion, water pollution, and visual blight in Okokomaiko directly reduce the labor capacity of its residents, thereby hindering economic growth. Achieving sustainability here requires not just infrastructure repair, but a holistic integration of the physical ecosystem with the socio-economic reality of its inhabitants.

## 8. Summary and Conclusion

The investigation into the Okokomaiko settlement reveals a stark disconnect between rapid peri-urban growth and sustainable environmental management. As this study has demonstrated, the current physical state of the community is characterized by a "blighted" landscape—marked by systemic infrastructure failure, severe ecological degradation in the form of perennial flooding, and a housing crisis defined by haphazard construction.

The findings suggest that the path toward achieving a sustainable physical environment in Okokomaiko requires a shift from top-down, technocratic planning to the Environmental Planning and Management (EPM) process. This process translates theoretical sustainability into real-world action by identifying, assessing, and prioritizing environmental issues through the lens of those who inhabit the space. Sustainable development in Okokomaiko must ensure that economic and technological progress does not sacrifice the ecological integrity of the region. Integrating environmental concerns into the socio-economic fabric of the settlement is not merely a policy preference but a survival necessity for this scientifically neglected frontier of the Lagos metropolis.

## Key Findings Summary:

1. **Physical Blight:** Widespread "urban dualism" where high-density migration meets zero infrastructure expansion.
2. **Ecological Crisis:** Blocked drainage channels and indiscriminate waste disposal leading to chronic waterlogging.
3. **Infrastructure Overstretch:** A total collapse of public water and electricity utilities, forcing residents into expensive and unsustainable private alternatives.
4. **Social Disorder:** A direct correlation between environmental decay and the rise of criminal hideouts and unhygienic commercial practices.

## 9. Actionable Recommendations

To transform Okokomaiko from a blighted landscape into a sustainable community, the following multi-dimensional strategies are proposed based on the EPM framework:

### 9.1. Adoption of the Bottom-Up EPM Concept

Drawing inspiration from the Sustainable Ibadan Project (SIP), Okokomaiko should adopt a participatory planning model.

**Consultation Forums:** Establish a city-level consultative forum specifically for the Ojo/Okokomaiko axis to clarify and prioritize environmental issues.

**Media Advocacy:** Leverage print and electronic media to give prominence to the Okokomaiko drainage and water crisis, forcing institutional accountability.

### 9.2. Integrated Stakeholder Engagement

Historical failures in Nigerian urban planning are often linked to the exclusion of "city actors" during the design phase. A Stakeholder Profiling approach must be implemented, involving:

1. Local Government & Politicians: To provide statutory backing and budget allocation.
2. Private Informal Sector: Specifically the Alaba International Market unions, who possess the financial capital to co-fund local infrastructure.
3. Community-Based Organizations (CBOs): To ensure "bottom-up" maintenance of renovated drainage and waste collection points.
4. NGOs & News Media: To act as watchdogs for environmental justice.

### 9.3. Infrastructure Revitalization and "Tactical Urbanism"

1. Drainage De-silting and Re-channeling: Immediate demolition of illegal structures on "open sewers" along the Alaba Rago-Ojo town link road is mandatory to mitigate flood hazards.
2. Water Reticulation: Reviving the dormant pipes networked by the Lagos State Water Board through a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) to reduce reliance on the Army Water Scheme and unregulated boreholes.
3. Power Optimization: Installation of high-capacity transformers and the exploration of solar-powered street lighting to disrupt the "dark spots" used by criminals during traffic congestion.

### 9.4. Policy and Regulatory Implementation

Government agencies must move beyond merely drafting policies to active enforcement. This includes:

1. Zoning Enforcement: Preventing the "juxtaposition of buildings" (haphazard construction) through stricter building permit inspections.
2. Sanitation Mandates: Compulsory provision of decentralized public toilet facilities in high-density commercial

nodes like the Alaba Rago market to eliminate open defecation.

### Final Word

The sustainability of Okokomaiko depends on the synergy between the government and the governed. It calls for inclusiveness, synergy, and participatory urban governance, which must be driven by adopting a broad-based, active participation model. The negative impacts of urbanization can be converted into advantages, ensuring a livable and resilient environment for future generations.

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