



URBAN RENEWAL AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR DISPLACEMENT AND INSECURITY IN NIGERIAN CITIES

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Abstract: *Urban Renewal in Nigeria has increasingly been embraced as a tool for economic growth and infrastructure improvement in urban centres. In most instances, this leads to the eviction of residents while business operations are disrupted during physical renewal, creating displacement and insecurity. This paper presents an exploratory analysis of the implications of urban renewal-induced internal displacement in Nigeria from 2019 up to the present. The qualitative secondary data used include those from reviewed journal articles and relevant newspaper publications that clearly outline the relationship between urban renewal initiatives and internal displacement. Key findings were indeed a substantial nexus between urban renewal programmes and the displacement of less-privileged people, leading to increased feelings of insecurity in the affected communities. Guided by such knowledge, critical policy interventions suggested by this paper have included, among other things, the articulation of a clearly stated state master plan, widespread dissemination of information about land use and topography, and improved interstate cooperation. Such recommendations are significant in ensuring that urban renewal is inclusive and sustainable, but not characterised by many incidences of displacement, while at the same time ensuring that development in urban areas remains fair.*

Keywords: *Insecurity; internal displacement; Nigeria; policy recommendations, Urban renewal*

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1. Introduction

Urban renewal is a defining feature of 21st-century urbanisation, particularly in rapidly urbanising settings like Nigeria. Urban renewal involves the physical and social upgrading of urban areas to increase infrastructure capacity, improve living conditions, and stimulate economic growth. However, although urban renewal is critical to national development, it increasingly prompts negative impacts, especially internal displacement and social insecurity.

Even as it promises urban rejuvenation, most urban renewal projects in Nigeria have moved people, including low-income households and more middle- and high-income earners, without fair compensation and realistic resettlement strategies (Ezeadichie & John-Nsa, 2021). The result is widespread social and economic displacement, insecurity, and shattered community networks. The physical and economic impacts of urban renewal and the general consequences of displacement have been investigated in previous research.

Scholars such as Ayeni et al. (2025) and Oyalowo (2025) have highlighted calls for new planning architectures in the wake of Nigeria's rapidly expanding urban population, estimated to be 119 million as of 2020. As much as the literature outlines infrastructure goals of renewal initiatives, these have been sparsely investigated to explore the connection between these projects and the advancement of internal displacement.

This study asks about the nexus of urban revitalisation and internal displacement in Nigerian cities. It analyses how different populations are affected, the emerging displacement patterns, and the implications for livelihood and city security. The article produces a two-way theoretical contribution drawing on Urban Development and Displacement Theory. The combination allows for more understanding of how well-meaning infrastructure projects can have exclusionary effects. It establishes the need for socially conscious and environmentally aware urban renewal policies.

In recognising loopholes in current urban renewal implementation, this paper offers pragmatic recommendations, such as prioritising mixed-income developments, safeguarding community rights, and improving green and people-focused urban spaces. These practices are vital to ensuring that Nigerian urban renewal promotes sustainable development without exacerbating internal displacement.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Urban Renewal: Definition and Strategies Employed in Nigerian Cities

Urban renewal refers to intentionally redeveloping weakened, underused, or obsolete urban areas to improve infrastructure, housing, public facilities, and overall urban performance (Aytenuw, Gebre-Egziabher & Woldetensae, 2025). It is intended to spur economic growth, promote social cohesion, and improve the living conditions of residents. Urban renewal in Nigeria has become imperative to address the pressure of fast-paced urban development, with projections estimating gigantic urban population growth by 2030 (Dorling, 2021).

This growth, driven mainly by rural-urban migration in search of better socioeconomic opportunities, has strained available urban infrastructure to the breaking point, leading to overcrowding, low standards of services, and declining physical condition (Awuah & Abdulai, 2022). Urban renewal is thus conducted to enhance cityscapes and bridge these development gaps. However, these interventions often come at a socio-economic cost, displacing the vulnerable population and disrupting livelihoods (Olajide & Lawanson, 2022).

In Nigerian cities, urban renewal policies have included slum clearance, land reclamation, road expansion, and public-private partnership (PPP) funded infrastructure projects. Lagos, for instance, has had major-scale land reclamation and estate development to ease congestion. However, they have also attracted criticism based on inadequate compensation and discriminatory resettlement policies, particularly targeting low-income residents and players in the informal economy (Alamu, Hassan, Asa & Odunayo, 2024).

There are four primary techniques applied in Nigeria's urban renewal:

Redevelopment: Demolition of dilapidated structures for new construction, as seen in Lagos and Abuja, especially Victoria Island and Lekki (Donahue, 2024).

Rehabilitation: Restoration of structurally sound but aged buildings, as seen in Surulere, Lagos (Ugwuejim et al., 2024).

Conservation: Preservation and regulated utilisation of historically significant or structurally sound buildings.

Revitalisation: Striking a balance between infrastructure improvement and socio-economic empowerment initiatives, such as the redevelopment of Oshodi market, which provided improved facilities and saved economic opportunities for traders.

The introduction of formal regeneration activities in 1955 by Nigeria's inaugural urban renewal programme, anchored on public health requirements in Lagos, initiated the formalisation of organised regeneration (Agbola, 1997). Despite these preliminary efforts, issues remain, ranging from weak planning systems and inadequate funding to inadequate displacement management (Olajide & Lawanson, 2022).

Contemporary urban renewal initiatives in Lagos, Abuja, and Rivers State have the potential to be transformative. However, for equity and sustainability, participatory planning, inclusive policy, and efficient compensation mechanisms take precedence (Obianyo et al., 2021). Community engagement in urban government arrangements will be crucial to Nigeria's socially equitable and resilient urbanisation.

2.2 Internal Displacement: Definition and Causes in the Context of Urban Policy

Internal displacement refers to the movement within national boundaries due to conflict, natural disasters, or development-induced factors such as urban renewal (Schimmel, 2022). Unlike cross-border displacement, internally displaced people (IDPs) remain under the legal jurisdiction of their national governments. Urban policy displacement is typically an unintentional consequence of renewal efforts to restore decayed urban neighbourhoods (Santos & Ramalhete, 2024). These projects, while geared towards upgrading infrastructure and attracting investment, end up causing forced evictions, inadequate compensation, and marginalisation of vulnerable populations (Cernea, 2021).

Causes of Internal Displacement in Urban Areas

- a. **Urban Renewal and Development Projects:** Urban renewal activities—such as slum clearance, road widening, and land reclamation—are implemented without participatory planning, resulting in mass displacement, particularly of residents of informal settlements. Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt projects have displaced thousands of individuals with little relocation support, as seen in the demolition of the Makoko waterfront in Lagos (Bamidele et al., 2022).
- b. **Exclusionary Urban Planning:** Nigerian urban policies are biased towards economic development at the cost of social equity and exclude low-income groups. The displaced individuals are forced to peripheral areas with limited services and livelihood opportunities, further deepening urban poverty and slum formation (Essien & Jesse, 2024).

- c. **Inadequate Compensation and Resettlement:** Displaced persons are usually undercompensated or uncompensated, rendering them unable to procure alternative shelter or continue their livelihoods. At Port Harcourt, for instance, waterfront settlements were compensated below market rates and relocated to underserved peripheries, deepening poverty cycles (Alaba & Agbaje, 2024).
- d. **Environmental Hazards and Poor Urban Infrastructure:** Flooding, erosion, and poor drainage in cities like Lagos and Port Harcourt displace thousands of individuals annually. Poor urban planning and delayed emergency response also worsen these impacts, illustrating urban policy's lack of disaster resilience (Olukunga et al., 2024).
- e. **Conflict and Civil Unrest:** More tangentially related to planning, ethnic and religious conflicts, especially in northern Nigeria, have resulted in mass migration into urban areas. Urban areas such as Jos and Kaduna witness increased pressures on housing and public facilities from such influxes (Ojo & Ojewale, 2018).

Effects of Internal Displacement in Urban Centres

- a. **Homelessness and Informal Settlements:** Displaced individuals usually migrate into slums or peri-urban areas with inadequate basic services, aggravating urban poverty and undermining development goals (Iloerika-Okafor et al., 2024).
- b. **Loss of Livelihoods:** Informal traders, artisans, and street vendors usually lose sources of income upon displacement, with little support to resume their businesses.
- c. **Social and Psychological Impacts:** Displacement disrupts community ties, education, and social stability; the resulting stress, isolation, and economic pressure cause long-term psychological and social dislocation.

2.3. Unravelling the Consequences of Urban Renewal-Induced Displacement in Nigeria: An Exploratory Analysis

Urban renewal activities, though oftentimes presented as causes of modernisation and economic revitalisation, have not only yielded complex and unpredictable effects but have particularly occasioned displacement, social disintegration, and insecurity.

While the majority of renewal efforts aim at slum upgrading, infrastructure development, and housing construction to enable investment, they tend to exclude the vulnerable groups, particularly the residents of informal settlements, from planning and implementation. The consequences are manifold and are disproportionately borne by the urban poor.

Socio-Economic Implications

- a. **Livelihood Loss:** Displacement is wrecking local economies on which the affected people primarily rely for casual employment. Large numbers have their enterprises or ways of living lost and cannot adapt to new, often economically limited environments, reinforcing poverty and inequality.
- b. **Housing Insecurity:** Low pay and resettlement policies leave many displaced individuals exposed to living on the fringes, often informal settlements without the basic amenities such as sanitation, health care, and safety (Corvalan et al., 2020).
- c. **Widening Inequality:** Urban renewal programmes benefit affluent neighbourhoods and investors at the cost of poorer communities. This widens socio-economic segregation, erodes community trust, and increases the risk of social unrest.

Psycho-Social Implications

- a. **Social Disintegration:** Displacement upsets well-developed social networks essential for communal support, particularly of poor and marginalised segments. This cumulative loss translates to isolation, vulnerability, and decreased resilience (Achem & Aderinto, 2024).
- b. **Loss of Identity:** Place-based cultural identities are created by societies. Displacement uncouples these, creating a crisis of cultural alienation and belonging, especially upon resettlement to unfamiliar or adverse environments (Westin, 2020).
- c. **Psychological Impacts:** Traumatic displacement often results in anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress. Left unmitigated by organised psycho-social interventions, these mental health effects contribute to the distress of affected populations.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Urban Development Theory and Displacement Theory to explore the dynamics of urban renewal, internal displacement, and insecurity in cities in Nigeria. The two theories combined explain how state-led development initiatives can lead to growth and socio-spatial inequality.

Urban Development Theory

Urban Development Theory explains city development as a result of industrialisation, modernisation, and governance processes. Two are particularly significant sub-theories, namely Modernisation Theory and Growth Pole Theory.

As developed by Rostow (1960), Modernisation Theory regards urban renewal as a sequential journey towards modernity driven by economic and technological advancement. Urban renewal schemes in Nigeria's upscale enclaves work on this premise, resulting in improved infrastructure and investment inflows (Wu, 2024). Critics argue that these plans isolate low-income individuals, resulting in further urban inequality and dislocation (Mmbadi, 2024).

Growth Pole Theory (Perroux, 1950) posits that urban investment has the potential to initiate regional development. Growth poles have been established in Nigerian cities like Lagos through conscious urban renewal. While this may stimulate economic development, it essentially causes uneven development, victimising the poor and worsening insecurity (Adewale & Ogunbanjo, 2022).

Thus, while Urban Development Theory indicates the economic rationale of revitalisation, it also points towards uneven outcomes favouring urban elites.

Displacement Theory

Displacement Theory concerns involuntary displacement's socio-economic and psychological impacts, especially in development-induced displacement (Cernea, 1997; Marcuse, 1986). In Nigeria, urban renewal programmes tend to result in the eviction of residents from squatter settlements without adequate resettlement support, resulting in further poverty and social exclusion (Wizor & Emerueh, 2020).

Displacement disrupts social networks, derails livelihoods, and shatters communal identity. Contrary to propositions that displacement is temporary and leads to long-term benefit, evidence from Nigerian cities suggests that displaced individuals undergo successive insecurity of housing and limited access to public goods (Adebajo, 2022). These conditions give rise to psychological trauma, social disintegration, and heightened urban insecurity (Davis et al., 2021).

Urban Development Theory maximises the economic justification for renewal, but Displacement Theory exposes the human cost. Together, they underscore the Nigerian urban modernisation paradox in which infrastructure growth is often accompanied by deepening poverty and social unrest. With such a prevalence of informal settlements, an approach to balanced, equity-based urban renewal is called for.

This study, therefore, utilises both paradigms to suggest an enhanced understanding of urban policy in Nigeria that seeks to promote inclusive development, minimise displacement, and foster urban resilience.

3. Methodology

A qualitative research design was employed in this study, and a critical literature review on urban renewal and its implications for displacement and insecurity in Nigerian cities was the focus. This aimed to identify, analyse, and synthesise multiple studies on the challenges of urban renewal and internally displaced persons. This literature review involved reading peer-reviewed journals, conference reports, and other relevant reports to understand the problem at hand. The aim was to identify overarching themes and observations that best represent the complex relationships between urban renewal projects and their consequent effects of displacement and insecurity. Data collected were thematically coded, and findings from different sources were synthesised to explain how urban renewal processes affect other demographic factors in Nigerian cities. The qualitative study presented a rich, contextual understanding of displaced people's experiences and the broader implications for urban policy and planning.

4. Urban Renewal and the Paradox of Development: Displacement and Insecurity in Nigerian Cities

Urban renewal is typically presented as a mechanism to enhance infrastructure, trigger economic growth, and undo urban decay. The hope is to have enhanced living and safety conditions, particularly in marginalised communities. In practice, though, these schemes in Nigerian cities tend to have the opposite impact more often than not, increasing displacement, solidifying insecurity, and fueling socio-economic injustice (Zaban, 2024).

Though city revitalisation endeavours to urbanise cities, it negatively impacts the most marginalised groups, especially those without official land rights. Evictions are often conducted with minimal compensation or resettlement and raise serious ethical and governance concerns (Unegbua et al., 2024). Even middle- and high-income families are increasingly subjected to forced evictions, which point to systemic weaknesses in Nigeria's urban planning and compensation frameworks (Alonge & Wadinga, 2021; Mmbadi, 2024).

Among the key enablers of displacement is Nigeria's Land Use Act (1978; 1990 amended), which centralises ownership and control of land in the hands of state governors. This legal structure facilitates mass evictions in the public interest, often evading international standards on involuntary resettlement (Partridge & Halmø, 2020). Informal settlers are most vulnerable, as they are not provided with compensation and legal protection.

Despite the development rhetoric, urban renewal in cities such as Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Abuja typically involves large-scale demolitions. Communities such as Makoko, Ibeju-Lekki, and Galadimawa have seen their people and livelihoods displaced without or with minimal compensation (Omilusi, 2020; Mmbadi, 2024). The most frequent justification for demolitions by law is either lawlessness or compliance with outmoded or selectively enforced master plans, highlighting a disconnect between planning and social justice.

The outcome is a perpetual cycle of insecurity, exclusion, and impunity. Courts have sometimes stepped in, but systemic failures of city governance persist to undermine the rights of the affected people. Without meaningful community engagement and participatory policy frameworks, urban renewal risks becoming a tool of disappropriation rather than development.

To match urban renewal with balanced growth, Nigeria must change its land administration, integrate participatory planning processes, and place social protections in city policy. Prioritising the welfare of people displaced by the urban renewal activities and offering fair mechanisms for compensation is key to creating inclusive, resilient, and equitable urban spaces.

5. Policy Implications and Actionable Recommendations

Whereas seeking to create urban infrastructure and standards, urban renewal in Nigeria has usually displaced people experiencing poverty and increased urban insecurity. Such unintended outcomes necessitate reorienting the existing policy, legal, and governance approaches.

Policy Implications

Urban renewal policy must shift from exclusionary, top-down models to inclusive ones that involve the voices of impacted communities. Today's domination by state governors under the Land Use Act centralises land power and frequently results in arbitrary evictions with no process. Reframing this legal code is required to integrate principles of fair compensation, security of tenure, and protection for informal settlers, like in global best practice.

Secondly, compensation procedures must be transparent, equitable, and reflective of property and livelihood losses. The significant elitist bias in the present compensation procedure undermines social justice and increases disparity. Compulsory accountability mechanisms are no less essential, with legal redressals and institutional controls in urban redevelopment procedures.

Actionable Recommendations

- a. The Federal Housing and Urban Development Ministry should establish Community Advisory Boards for efficient communication with impacted groups. State Urban Planning Agencies should facilitate the performance of regular consultation to integrate community needs into project plans.
- b. The National Assembly, CSOs, and lawyers should revise the Land Use Act to incorporate protection from forced evictions and protection for informal settlers. The legal reforms need to prioritise equitable access to land and justice.
- c. The Federal Ministry of Works and Housing must develop transparent and non-discriminatory compensation policies to pay for alternative shelter and livelihood replacement for the displaced.
- d. There must be a separate monitor at the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons that tracks urban renewal initiatives to guarantee legal and ethical adherence, enhancing transparency and accountability.

- e. Comprehensive support programmes for displaced persons through legal aid, psychosocial counselling, and economic rehabilitation through vocational training and microfinance must be offered by the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs.

6. Conclusion

Urban renewal in Nigeria, as directed to infrastructural and economic transformation, has adverse socio-economic impacts, especially on marginal communities. This study focuses on the nexus between urban renewal and forced eviction, which, in turn, contributes to insecurity and expands urban inequality. Urban renewal, in response, would also have to be conceptualised as an inclusive, rights-based endeavour to mitigate such impacts. Legal reforms, equitable compensation, participatory planning, and robust institutional oversight must accompany urban development to be socially just. Concentrating on the interests of vulnerable groups, Nigerian cities can be inclusive, secure, and economically prosperous spaces that honour the precepts of sustainable development and good governance.

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