

# URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA: THE CASE OF LAGOS

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Redevelopment is a recurring theme in urban history. Just as building was a part of city growth, so rebuilding became necessary to overcome obsolescence and to alter past mistakes. Each rebuilding phase, however, was more costly than the last. This has been particularly true since the Industrial Revolution when our modern cityscape began to develop form and substance. For the first time, it was possible to support large concentrations of people in centers, which, in turn, grew at rates considered impossible by pre-industrial standards. Today, urban growth is no longer a geographic singularity; a unique feature of the Western World. The impact of urbanization on Great Britain and the United States is now being felt in the younger, emergent nations. Here, in fact, the social and physical effects of urbanization are greater. The later a country experiences industrialization, the faster is the process of urbanization.<sup>1</sup> Thus, redevelopment, an essential part of the historic city, has assumed an even more vital and necessary role in our present urban planning concept. But, it remains to be determined just what course future redevelopment should take. The United States, with its seemingly unlimited assets, has been unable to overcome the blighted conditions of her cities through urban renewal. How, then, is redevelopment possible for those countries that are less fortunate financially or materially? And, can redevelopment, as presently conceived, be effectively applied in these areas?

Lagos, Nigeria, capital and principal urban agglomeration of the most populous of African countries, offers a case study whereby this question may be answered. The framework for analysis is the Central Lagos Slum Clearance Project, a scheme that directly attacked the unsanitary and overcrowded conditions prevalent over much of Lagos Island. The purpose is not to criticize the scheme, for this has been done elsewhere in considerably more detail.<sup>2</sup> Instead, the redevelopment project is evaluated within the broader setting of African urbanization, particularly those aspects of rural immigration and natural population increase.

Metropolitan Lagos numbers approximately 800,000 people,<sup>3</sup> distribut-

<sup>1</sup> Kingsley Davis, "The Urbanization of the Human Population," *Scientific American*, Vol. 213, No. 3, September, 1965, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> Only a summary of the scheme is given here. For a more detailed analysis of the Central Lagos Slum Clearance Project, see Otto Koenigsberger, Charles Abrams, et al., *Metropolitan Lagos*, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1964, pp. 177-189, and Peter Marris, *Family and Social Change in an African City*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), pp. 82-95.

<sup>3</sup> Koenigsberger and Abrams, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

ed evenly between Lagos Island and the mainland (Figure 1). From a small British trading and slave port, the original Island settlement grew slowly until the beginning of the twentieth century when it recorded 40,000 inhabitants. By 1950, the population had grown to 250,000 resulting in a dense concentration on the island and a spillover of people to the mainland.<sup>4</sup> The most spectacular numerical increase was yet to come. In the period

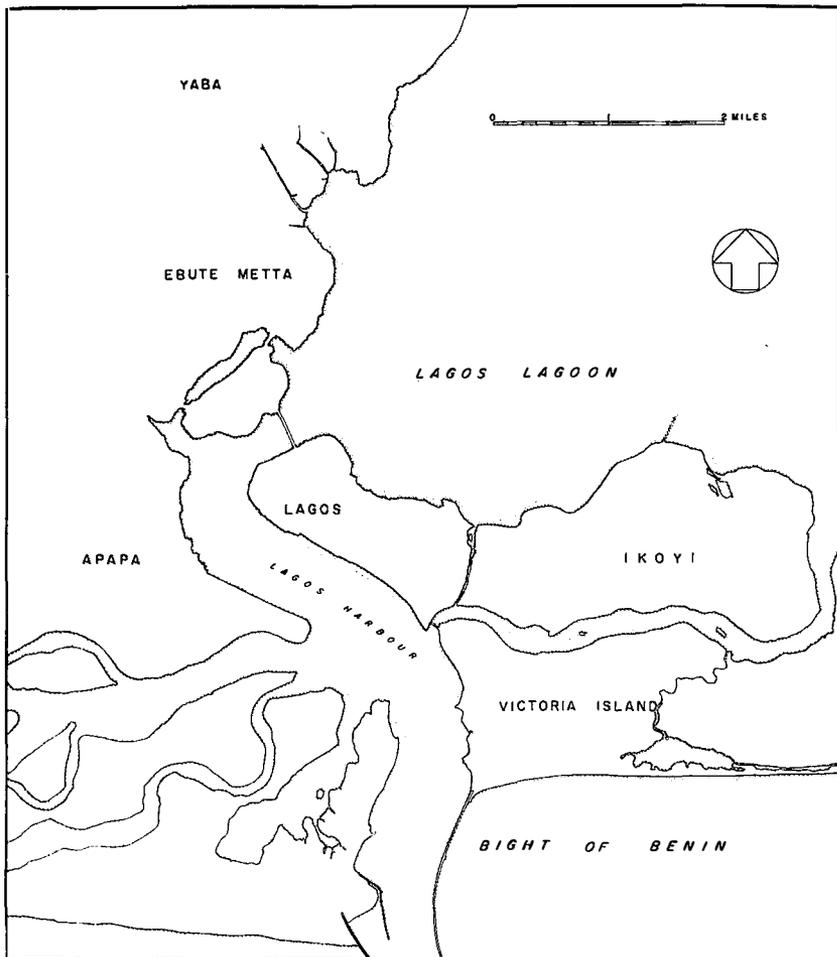


Figure 1. Lagos and Principal Suburbs.

1952-1962, Lagos and its suburbs added over 420,000 people, mainly through immigration.<sup>5</sup> This latest expansion has occurred principally on the mainland: whereas 36,000 Lagotians lived "off" the island in 1952, and

<sup>4</sup> Akin L. Mabogunje, "The Evolution and Analysis of the Retail Structure of Lagos, Nigeria," *Economic Geography*, Vol. 40, No. 4, October, 1964, p. 304.

<sup>5</sup> Koenigsberger and Abrams, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

accounted for 12 per cent of the total urban population, ten years later this group had swelled to 277,000 or 39 per cent of the total population.<sup>6</sup> At the same time 180,000 new residents were added to what was already a densely built-up and overcrowded island. Undesirable physical and social conditions, which have always been present in Lagos, have been intensified by this recent phenomenal growth in population. For example, Lagos has never had a sewer system. Between the night soil collectors and open storm drains, effluents eventually make their way to the harbor and lagoon. Infant mortality is still a very high 62.9 per 1000 live births, in spite of recent medical advances.<sup>7</sup> Clearly, something had to be done, if not to make Lagos a better place in which to live, at least to transform the city into a respectable capital worthy of its position in a soon-to-be independent nation.<sup>8</sup>

#### THE CENTRAL LAGOS SLUM CLEARANCE PROJECT

Redevelopment was applied in Lagos as early as 1928, when the Lagos Executive Development Board, the principal planning authority, was created to deal with redevelopment in an overcrowded and unsanitary part of the city that had experienced an outbreak of bubonic plague.<sup>9</sup> The Board was founded and maintained as a statutory corporation modelled after the Improvement Trust formula with a two fold purpose: planning authority and executive development. Its powers include the right of interim development and compulsory acquisition of land, but without the authority to levy taxes to insure financial support. Instead, the Board relies on contracts for most of its working capital.

By any density, health, or maintenance standards, the 70-acre area selected by the LEDB in 1951 for redevelopment was a slum (Figure 2). The road to industrialization in Lagos, as in other tropical and extratropical cities, produced physical liabilities as material assets were being created. The tremendous population expansion of Lagos discussed previously left very little breathing time in which to produce even the most rudimentary therapeutic measures.

The land use activities within the redevelopment area were an admixture of commercial, residential, and industrial sites. After land acquisition, the LEDB was to clear the existing structures, replan the entire area with widened streets, rear access service roads, open spaces, and new plot layouts.<sup>10</sup> Twenty net acres for residential redevelopment were to be available, along with 22 net acres for commercial activities.<sup>11</sup> After site planning, the first choice of plots went to the former owners, reselling at 120 per cent of the acquisition cost.<sup>12</sup> The government outlay, needed initially to acquire

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Koenigsberger and Abrams, *op.cit.*, p. 198.

<sup>8</sup> Marris, *op. cit.*, p. 84. . . . .

<sup>9</sup> J. W. Henderson, "Lagos, Nigeria, The Work of the Lagos Executive Development Board," *Journal of the Town Planning Institute*, Vol. XLIV, April, 1958, p. 114.

<sup>10</sup> Lagos Executive Development Board, Annual Report and Accounts (1955-1956), pp. 18-22.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Koenigsberger and Abrams, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

the land, would thus be partially or wholly recovered. If the holding could not be resold to the former owner, a priority claim would be given for an equivalent area of land within the project, as near as possible to the original site. And, if this was impossible, or if the person so desired, space was provided in other LEDB development freeholds.<sup>13</sup> The project was drawn up in 1951 and inaugurated in 1955.

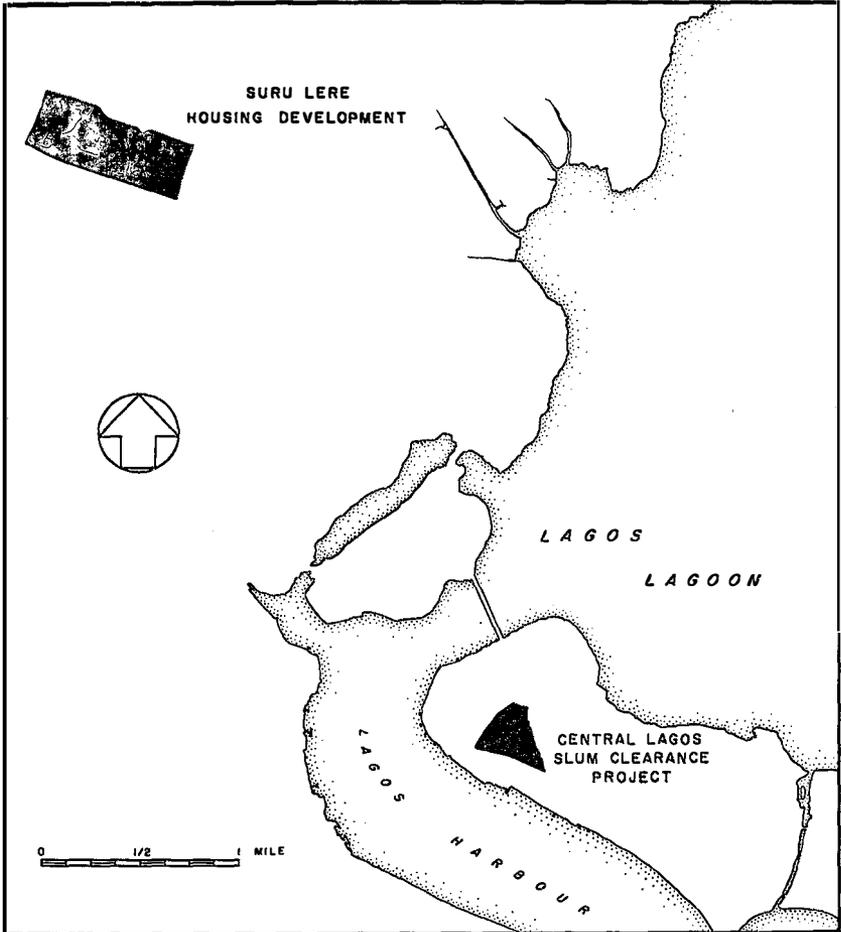


Figure 2. The Central Lagos Slum Clearance Project and the Suru-Lere Housing Estate.

The number of Lagotians directly affected in the project area was estimated at 20,000.<sup>14</sup> Accommodations for these displaced persons were also planned for, and were an integral part of the slum clearance scheme. While demolition was taking place in central Lagos, the LEDB of the island (Figure 2). Funds for the construction at Suru-Lere came from the govern-

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 177-178.

<sup>14</sup> *Lagos Executive Development Board, Annual Report and Accounts, (1955-1956), pp. 18-22.*

ment and a fixed rental of 25 shillings per room, per month, was assessed.<sup>15</sup> The new housing was considered "temporary" as the displaced persons were to move back to central Lagos once the slum clearance project was completed (Figure 3).

Initial progress in the project area was good although marred by the protests of people who were to be displaced. During 1956, for example, police assistance was needed on three separate occasions to enforce eviction,

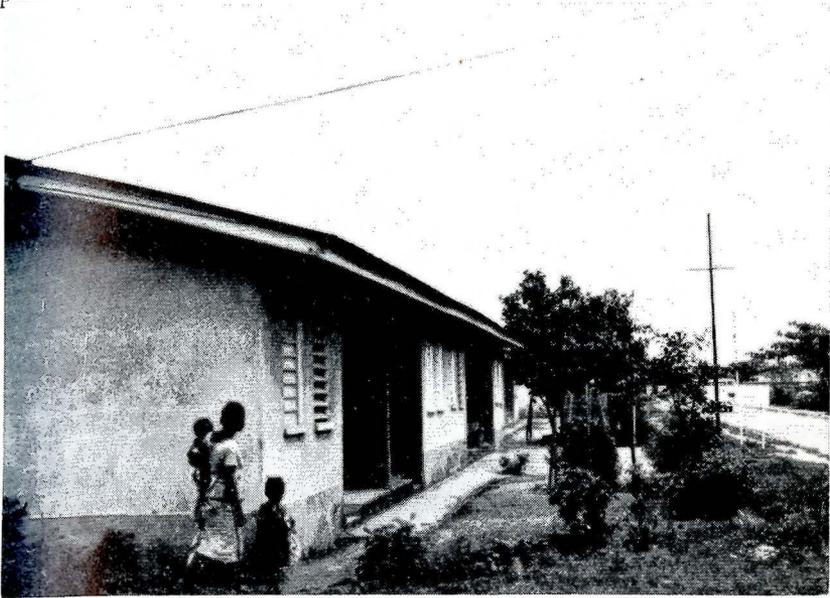


Figure 3. Resettlement Housing in Suru-Lere.

the most serious demonstration taking place in June at Porto Novo Market Street.<sup>16</sup> Eviction proceeded, however, and by 1957, 3,000 people had been removed from the project site. Two thousand settled in Suru-Lere while the remainder found homes for themselves, in many cases by moving into adjacent, overcrowded areas. Housing construction at Suru-Lere was progressing with 550 homes having been constructed and occupied. The erection of temporary shops in the cleared project area was a minor alteration in the original redevelopment plan. Shops were permitted as well in Suru-Lere, but actually represented "restarts" by these individuals displaced from central Lagos. Both areas were to see more of this unscheduled land use in the future.

In the following three years, an additional 4300 persons were removed from central Lagos. The number of temporary shops doubled, and a special mortgage fund was started to assist those former owners who were financially unable to carry out rebuilding according to the LEBD plan. Similarly, the Board admitted for the first time that the financial inability of the for-

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Marris, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

mer owner would cause a delay in the total rebuilding program.<sup>17</sup> Although 913 houses were available and occupied in Suru-Lere, a further housing scheme was approved in 1957 that added 600 additional low cost houses in an area contiguous to the initial Suru-Lere site. The need for new houses

**TABLE 1**  
**Land Use Compositoin —**  
**Central Lagos Slum Clearance Project**

Areal Components	Acres	Percentage of Total Area
Built-up Sites	3.60	14.4
Plots Reconveyed and Ready for Development	4.50	18.0
Building Started	0.70	2.8
Area of Plots Where Deposits Have Been Paid	6.80	27.2
Roads	8.40	33.6
Vacant Area	1.00	4.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>25.00</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Otto Koenigsberge, Charles Abrams, et. al., *Metropolitan Lagos*, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1964, pp. 187-188.

unrelated to increased emigration from the slum clearance project, but was due to the reluctance of those initially evicted from central Lagos to leave Suru-Lere once they had reestablished themselves. This was contrary to the original LEBD plan which called for a constant turnover of tenants,

**TABLE 2**  
**Central Lagos Slum Clearance Project**  
**Capital Account, Year Ended March 31, 1964**

Expenditure				Income			
Item	Cost			Item	Cost		
	£	s	d		£	s	d
Land Acquisition	2,284,359	7	6	Grant and Loan from Nigerian Governmen	3,060,000	0	0
Building Acquisition	1,065,006	17	10	Sale of Land	776,411	11	0
Transport of Affected Persons to Suru-Lere	11,107	4	5	Deposits on Land	259,581	10	6
Site Development	474,035	13	0	Sale of Salvaged Materials	22,056	10	5
General Development Expenses	253,748	18	5	Other	95,182	2	7
Ex-gratia Compensation including temporary shop erection	177,631	2	2	Surplus Rents, Temporary Shops	79,260	15	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,265,889</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>4,292,492</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>

Source: Lagos Executive Development Board, Annual Report and Accounts (1963-1964), pp. 58-59.

<sup>17</sup> *Lagos Executive Development Board*, Annual Report and Accounts (1959-1960), pp. 17-20.

but efforts to remove these “squatters” met with little success. At the same time, the number of temporary service facilities continued to increase, as in central Lagos, and a “temporary” market was created.<sup>18</sup>

By 1962, the total number of evictees approached 12,000 and land taking in central Lagos came to a virtual standstill.<sup>19</sup> Table 1 indicates the land use composition and effectively summarizes the project’s accomplishments. With only twenty-five of the seventy acres cleared, most of the original slum was intact. Although much of the cleared area was occupied by those initially displaced, they did not build new buildings as planned, but erected temporary structures or rented the same. Only 160 plots were reconveyed while 305 temporary shops were in use. A feeling of permanency settled over the project area (Figure 4). Similarly, the transient



**Figure 4. Undeveloped Space and Temporary Structures in the Heart of the Slum Clearance Project.**

housing scheme, which provided for the 600 additional homes, experienced the same fate as the initial slum clearance housing scheme, resistance of the tenants to move once they were settled in. The people were not only reluctant to move after displacement, but facilities for settlement in central Lagos were generally lacking.<sup>20</sup> Although 1513 housing units were erected at Suru-Lere, some of the 11,800 persons displaced still needed housing.

Ten years have passed since the slum clearance project was started. The original 2.95 million pound expenditure needed to get the project

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Lagos Executive Development Board, Annual Report and Accounts (1961-1962), pp. 18-22.

<sup>20</sup> Koenigsberger and Abrams, *op cit.*, pp. 181-182.

underway has grown to 4.3 million pounds,<sup>21</sup> exclusive of Suru-Lerc (Table 2). Former owners have paid back three-quarters of a million pounds and have made deposits on other sites totaling one quarter of a million pounds. However, a substantial number of the former owners lack the additional means to continue improvements according to the LEBD plan. Even if the money were available, and the initial LEBD compensation retained, the 20 per cent increase in land cost, in most cases, is beyond the means of



**Figure 5. Martin Street. High-rise and Temporary Market Stalls**

most of those who desire to return to central Lagos. Also, after replanning, the net area available for resettlement in the scheme is 42 acres out of the original 70 acres taken.<sup>22</sup> Street widening and open spaces are definite improvements to the general settling, but they mean that all parties cannot be returned to the project.

Benefits have resulted from the project and the skyline of the area has been strikingly altered. Figure 5 illustrates part of the office complex now

<sup>21</sup> *Lagos Executive Development Board, Annual Report and Accounts (1963-1964)*, pp. 58-59.

<sup>22</sup> Koenigsberger and Abrams, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

found on Martin Street. Nearby, the Bristol Hotel and small-scale commercial developments have emerged. Sections of Broad Street could pass for any metropolitan area in the United States and high-rise apartments provide new housing, albeit at higher costs. A new roundabout was created at Tinubu Square, but one block away in any direction, traffic congestion has increased. The taxes on the new additions bring more revenue to the coffers of the Town Council, but increased income has not wiped out the project debt.

The two housing estates at Suru-Lere are meeting yearly maintenance expenses, principally through rents, although the original cost of development is far from being liquidated. The total cost of both estates was 1,309,464 pounds, covered by federal loans of 1,226,700 pounds,<sup>23</sup> 10 per cent of which has been repaid. In both Suru-Lere and the central Lagos project area, over 4,500,000 pounds was supplied by the Nigerian Government.

#### EVALUATION AND THE SETTING FOR REDEVELOPMENT

The Central Lagos Slum Clearance Project attempted to alter the physical image of the city and to improve the welfare of its inhabitants by removing unsanitary conditions, reducing the density on the land, and decreasing overcrowding. In the final analysis, these worthwhile goals were not accomplished. Although one may support the desire to remake central Lagos because it is a "a disgrace to the capital of Nigeria,"<sup>24</sup> or agree with the LEDB argument that "the interests of the residents should not be allowed to override the will of 35 million Nigerians,"<sup>25</sup> desire alone is an insufficient moving force, and will is no assurance of success. However, the project failure in Lagos should not be equated with the failure of the redevelopment concept. The principal force that doomed the project, and redevelopment from the beginning, was the increase in urban population after World War II, which reached its greatest intensity during the time of the slum clearance project.

The contemporary growth of Lagos has its origin in two related phenomena—rural-urban migration and natural population increase brought about by an excess of births over deaths. The movement from rural to urban areas was an established fact in Lagos and other African cities before 1955, but appears to have been ignored by those officials responsible for the success of the slum clearance project and Suru-Lere. The pressure of this influx lowered the vacancy rate of liveable structures in the city, which, in turn, lead to further overcrowding. At the same time, the slum clearance project was reducing a housing inventory that was small or non-existent, thereby making the housing shortage in Lagos more acute. Clearly, a large-scale housing program should have preceded slum clearance as the first phase of redevelopment. But housing provisions are a therapeutic measure at best in an urban area whose rapid growth is based on rural emigration.

<sup>23</sup> *Lagos Executive Development Board, Annual Report and Accounts (1963-1964)*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>24</sup> Marris, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. 90.

There are any number of reasons why rural peoples desire to move to a city, and in the case of Lagos, several stand out. A prime motive is economic; if opportunities are felt to be better in the city, people will be drawn to these opportunities. Glamour, or simply the attraction of the city, is another factor of emigration, particularly if combined with economic opportunity. Another important stimulus to movement is the provision of services that cannot be easily or economically supplied to people scattered throughout a rural area. Such services include medical and health facilities, family and educational services, and community facilities; provisions that an American or European are apt to take for granted, but a rural African considers desirable.<sup>26</sup> Finally, there is the ability of rural areas to support large numbers of people. If a population boom is combined with agricultural underemployment, this ability is weakened. Both situations exist today in Nigeria, the former helping determine the latter.

Natural population increase is not limited to rural Nigeria, but is a potent force within her cities as well, especially Lagos. Historically, in Western urban development, the mortality rate of cities exceeded that of the rural areas. Eventually the urbanizing nations learned how to keep crowded populations in cities from dying like flies and this knowledge has been passed onto those societies such as Nigeria where urbanization has only recently begun. Thus, in Africa today, the traditional mortality disadvantage of the cities and towns had been wiped out, and in many cases has been reversed.<sup>27</sup>

Redevelopment in Lagos never had a chance for success, in spite of the efforts of the LEDB staff, or the considerable amount of funds supplied by the Nigerian Government. Rural migration coupled with a disproportionate natural population increase were the cards stacked against any redevelopment project. Such city services as envisioned in Suru-Lere and the slum clearance area could be created fast enough to take care of the never-ending supply of babies and rural migrants swelling an already large urban population.<sup>28</sup> One can only come to the pessimistic conclusion that redevelopment in Lagos, or in cities similar to Lagos in other parts of the underdeveloped world, can never be successful so long as the present bases of urban growth remains unhinged from economic development. To attempt other redevelopment projects in the face of this situation is to court further failures.

<sup>26</sup> R. W. Steel, "The Towns of Tropical Africa," *Essays on African Population*, ed. K. M. Barbour and R. M. Prothero (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962), p. 264.

<sup>27</sup> Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 52.