

THE IMPACT OF INDISCRIMINATE COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES IN LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL AREAS: A CASE STUDY OF MINNA, NIGER STATE

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ABSTRACT

Low density residential areas provide decent accommodation for middle and high income earners. These areas usually have simple well organized layouts served with basic physical and social infrastructure. Commercial activities are largely restricted to neighbourhood shopping centres. In recent times however, areas designated as such in minna have come to be dotted with commercial activities some contained in frontal shops attached to the compound and others in makeshift structures such as containers, wooden sheds, umbrella stands, zinc sheds and sometimes in the plain open air. This paper examines the impact of these activities on both the environment and also on the physical and mental health of residents. Structured questionnaires were administered and personal observations made. The findings show that the shops primarily generate income not only for the owners but also the landlord where he is the owner of the building or structure. Other reasons for these businesses are security from daytime burglars and leisure activity. It is also clear that quite a number of these businesses were not approved by any official body and they do not pay any revenue to the Government. It is recommended that public enlightenment on the effects of environmentally degrading activities be intensified. Also preventive measures should be taken so that this problem does not occur in new layouts while curative measures need to be taken to enforce development control laws in zones that are already degenerating.

Keywords:- Commercial Activity, Degradation, Environment, Low Density, Residential.

INTRODUCTION

Human society constantly experiences changes and these changes inevitably affect the physical development of cities and towns. If development in these urban areas are not properly handled, according to Achi (2004), they play an essential role in degrading the physical environment and in destroying the social environment. Unfortunately, this is already the case in quite a number of Nigerian cities and towns, Minna metropolis inclusive. Land in urban areas is utilized for residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, recreational and many other purposes. Residential areas come under one of the following classifications – low density, medium density or high density according to such parameters as specified plot sizes, specified maximum site coverage by buildings, specified maximum height of buildings, specified maximum number of habitable rooms and specified maximum floor space of buildings. Urban population density needs to be controlled in order to ensure that a given plot of land accommodates only the prescribed number of persons so that appropriate physical and social infrastructure can be provided for them. (Obateru, 2005.) There is also the need to avoid the problem of overcrowding which foster situations in which anti-social behavior can thrive. In low density areas the plots are usually 30.5m x30.5m while in medium and high density areas they are 30.5m x23.0m and 30.5m x 50m respectively. The plot-size technique of controlling densities has however, been severally criticized as being unacceptable as it excludes certain classes of people from living in low density areas. Low density zones, which form the focus of this paper, are characterized by neat, spacious, decent, peaceful and quiet environment. The layout is simple and well organized and the zones are served with good transportation network and basic public utilities - electricity supply, water supply and telecommunications network. Commercial activities are restricted to neighbourhood shopping centres. There are also areas designated for recreational activities. Minna metropolis has seen a steady influx of people over the years and even more so in the past decade. This has resulted in an increase in housing demand together with certain negative effects on the environment. Some of them as outlined by Odiaua et al (2007) are increase in population density, rise in room occupancy rate, pressure on physical and social infrastructure, huge waste generation and environmental pollution problems. There is also a general disregard for development control laws and regulation such that low density residential areas are fast losing the right to carry such designation. The major reason for this is the need to generate income. Some owners of

The Impact of Indiscriminate Commercial Activities in Low Density Residential Areas: A Case Study of Minna, Niger State

plots in these zones sub-divide them in order to build rooms which are rented out to students, civil servants, bankers e.t.c. This of course increases the occupancy rate without a corresponding increase in available infrastructure. This problem is certainly not peculiar to Minna as is evident in a study carried out by Garba et al (2007) in Bauchi metropolis on the effects of poverty on low density plots in urban environment. The findings indicate that some home owners of plots sub-divided them either for sale or to accommodate tenants. There is of course no corresponding increase in facilities, utilities etc. even though there's an increase in population density. The result is that the areas studied are fast becoming high density residential areas and the researchers forecast that this unchecked development would eventually lead to slum conditions. Today's town planners are faced with conditions of scarce urban economic resources and competing priorities of neighbourhood interest groups, businesses, and residents. (Listokin et al 2006) There is therefore the need to be fully equipped to target and deliver adequate physical and social infrastructure where needed.

THE STUDY AREA

Minna encompass territories extending from Kpagungu to Maitumbi and from Chanchaga to Maikunkele. However, for the purpose of this paper, only F- layout and Bosso Lowcost housing estate are looked at. These two areas were chosen because they represent the situation in the other areas. The problem is still at a premature stage in Bosso low-cost while it is definitely severe in F-layout.

THE PROBLEM

Indiscriminate commercial activities are carried on at every corner of low density residential zones around Minna ranging from sale of Provisions, Drugs, Stationary, Clothes both new and used Food stuff, Fruits Roasted maize Soft drinks etc To provision of such services as Hair dressing and barbing Grinding of tomatoes, beans etc, Computer services, Video cassette rentals, GSM calls and sale of recharge cards, Playing snooker Watching football matches and playing video games Restaurants, Tailoring, And sale of aluminium building materials. There are also *mai shais*, *mai suyas* and others frying bean cakes, potatoes, yam, *masa* e.t.c Some of these activities are housed in frontal shops while others are carried on in makeshift structures such as shipping containers, wooden kiosks, sheds constructed from used zinc sheets, under umbrellas and in some situations in the open air. These unplanned, mostly unapproved commercial ventures constitute a degradation of the urban environment through littering of streets with waste materials (such as 'pure water' bags, sweet and biscuit wrappers) and distracting from the aesthetics of the streetscape while also having negative impact on the mental health of residents particularly those who have enjoyed the peace and quite for a long period of time.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researchers relied on both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data was obtained from 50 questionnaires (36 respondents were business proprietors) administered around the chosen low density residential areas to determine the impact that commercial activities have on both the environment and on the residents. Personal observations were also made during the field survey. Again, oral interviews with government officials of various bodies yielded some relevant information. In addition, relevant literature was reviewed.

FINDINGS

- It is quite obvious that commercial activity is on the increase in low density residential areas of Minna. In some cases landlords live side by side with tenants. More and more landlords in these zones are constructing frontal shops which are rented by both people resident on the street and those not resident. Residents in the low income group bracket who cannot afford to rent these frontal shops put up makeshift structures instead. On one street in F-layout, there are fourteen shops, six of them selling provisions, one hair dressing salon, one barber's shop, three tailors, one video cassette rental shop and one, yet to be occupied. There are also many other shops along the major highway adjacent to this street offering for sale similar goods and services. This is the situation on many streets in the areas being studied.
- It is also clear that these activities have impacts on both the physical and mental health of residents of such streets, and particularly those who have lived there for 11 years and above. Wastes generated are left to litter the streets and in some places, available open spaces having being taken over by commercial activities, youths play football in the street.

- It was observed that 50% of these businesses were owned by persons with alternative employment. Many however provided the only source of income for their proprietors.
- The positive impacts according to frequency, enjoyed by the respondents within these zones are
 - ↳ Proximity of goods and services
 - ↳ Availability of such goods and services even after the market has been closed
 - ↳ Security from daytime burglars.
 - ↳ A few engage in commercial ventures as a form of leisure activity.
- The negative impacts listed according to frequency are
 - ↳ Noise pollution
 - ↳ Littering of the streets with waste items particularly 'pure water' sachets,
 - ↳ Contamination of the environment thereby increasing risk of contacting certain diseases
 - ↳ Rowdiness,
 - ↳ Increase in crime rate,
 - ↳ Overcrowding and
 - ↳ Protrusion of some of these shops onto the road so that driving is made difficult.
 - ↳ Sale of stale goods.
- Still, it is worthy of note that 30.56% (11 persons) of those with shops claim to have obtained approval from Niger State Urban development Board (NUDB) before putting up the shop. 36.11% claim to pay revenue of between N1000 – N5000 while 5.56% pay N6000 and above per month to the authorities. 52.78% (19 persons most of them in Bosso Lowcost) do not pay any revenue. 5.56% did not respond to the question.
- On the issue of waste collection and disposal, 86.11% (31 persons) claim to have a bin or something to collect wastes generated by their businesses even though it was clearly insufficient in cases and even non-evident in some others. Among the 13.89% who answered no to whether or not they had something with which waste was collected, some claim that they swept the premises in the morning and either burnt the refuse or just threw it onto a refuse dump.
- It is also clear that business proprietors do not really understand the negative impacts of their businesses on the environment and other residents of the area.
- Many residents not involved in commercial activities and who have lived in the zones for upwards of 11 years approve of businesses on their streets but also point out that the disadvantages associated with them far outweigh the advantages.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In areas where the urban environment is fast degenerating, curative measures need to be taken to curb this degeneration. Spaces occupied by illegal businesses need to be reclaimed.
2. Public awareness on damaging effects of environmentally degrading activities definitely needs to be intensified.
3. Presence of physical infrastructure is a main attracting factor to live in low density zones. Provision of such facilities (good road network, water supply, electricity supply, good drainage network, etc) should be extended to other sections of the town in order to stop the congestion of low density zones.
4. Minna is a town experiencing rapid expansion. Care needs to be taken to ensure that developers in new layouts adhere strictly to planning laws and regulations.
5. Poverty and unemployment, being some factors responsible for this problem, need intensified dealing with.

CONCLUSION

The desire to generate income by proprietors of commercial ventures (legal or illegal) in low density residential areas is certainly legitimate but this does not justify the bold disregard for planning laws, degradation of the natural environment, negative effects on the physical and mental health of inhabitants. Many whose lives are being made uncomfortable by these activities feel handicapped to do anything about it. Commercial activities in residential quarters should as much as possible be restricted to well defined and well planned neighborhood shopping centers or corner shops approved by the Niger State Urban Development Board.

The Impact of Indiscriminate Commercial Activities in Low Density Residential Areas: A Case Study of Minna, Niger State

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APPENDICES

Table 1:- Age of business

Area	Less than 5 years	6-10 years	11 years and above	Total
F- layout	15	2	3	20
Bosso lowcost	10	4	2	16
Total	25	6	5	36
%	69.44	16.67	13.89	100

Source:- Authors' field

Table 2:- Government approval

Area	Yes	No	I don't know	Total
F- layout	7	1	12	20
Bosso lowcost	4	7	5	16
Total	11	8	17	36
%	30.56	22.22	47.22	100

Source:- Authors' field

Table 3:- Payment of revenue

Area	Nothing	N1000-N5000	N6000 and above	No response	Total
F- layout	6	10	2	2	20
Bosso lowcost	13	3	-	-	16
Total	19	13	2	2	36
%	52.78	36.11	5.56	5.56	100

Source:- Authors' field

Table 4:- waste collection

Area	Yes	No	Total
F- layout	17	3	20
Bosso low-cost	14	2	16
Total	31	5	36
%	86.11	13.89	100

Source:- authors' field

Note:- The streets were littered from wastes generated by these businesses. Immediate areas around the shops were swept in the mornings and refuse left some distance away, burnt or thrown to a nearby refuse dump.

Table 5:- Awareness of negative effects of business on environment and residents

Area	Yes	No	Total
F- layout	3	17	20
Bosso lowcost	5	11	16
Total	8	28	36
%	22.22	77.78	100

Source:- authors' field

The following tables apply to non- business proprietors. Note that on each street, there are very few houses not involved in one form of business or the other.

Table 6:- Opinion concerning businesses on the street

Area	Stongly approve	Approve	Strongly disapprve	Disapprove	Total
F- layout	1	2	3	1	7
Bosso lowcost	-	7	-	-	7
Total	1	9	3	1	14
%	7.14	64.29	21.43	7.14	100

Source:- authors' field

Table 7:- Do you agree that the disadvantages of having so many shops/businesss outweigh the advantages?

Area	Stongly agree	Agree	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Total
F- layout	0	2	1	4	7
Bosso lowcost	0	5	1	1	7
Total	0	7	2	5	14
Percentage (%)	0	50	14.29	35.71	100

Source: - authors' field work.