

# WHD FEATURE



## Bringing the MDGs to Lagos

THESE days, John Adamu, like many of his neighbours, goes to bed each night fighting a growing sense of helplessness. A brilliant athlete in his student days, John had always prided himself in the competitive streak that earned him a place on the school's athletics team and later inspired his efforts at launching a sporting career.

His sporting days long over, John now realizes that he has to strive much harder than ever before to make ends meet: Like almost one million other Nigerians, John neither has a home of his own, nor is he confident he would meet the next yearly rental payment on the single-room apartment he shares in Lagos with his wife and four children. In the past five years, the rent has doubled.

Metropolitan Lagos, Nigeria's largest city, is a symbol of the most dramatic characteristics of the urbanization crisis facing cities across Africa.

From a population of 5.7 million in 1991, the number of people living in Lagos rose to 13.4 million in 2000, and had more than doubled to 15 million by 2004. An exceptionally high rural-urban migration rate accounts for three out of every four additional persons swelling the city's population.

Though urban poverty levels in the city – 51 per cent for men and 54 per cent for women – have remained quite high by international standards, they are lower than the national poverty estimates, which have been put at 58.3 per cent for urban centres and about 70 per cent in general. Living conditions in the city have however, been affected by what state officials term "the mismatch between rapid urban growth and the growth in resources."

Since 1994, home, to John, has been a multi-tenant structure located in a high-density community. A row of two toilets and two shower stalls at the rear, provide bathroom facilities for residents of the 12 rooms on every floor. The building, like others in the area, is not connected to the public water mains, and residents depend on a commercial well located down the road for their water supply. Electricity is also not in regular supply, given that most rooms, being illegally connected to the power lines, are not metered. Outside the house, with the bitumen surface of the road long gone, extensive



exposure to the elements has created deep craters that test the endurance of even the sturdiest vehicles.

Private firms recruited by the state government to cart away the city's mountains of refuse are unheard of here. Like in similar communities in Lagos, itinerant cart pushers hold sway in this neighbourhood, charging unregulated fees to remove household waste. Those unwilling to pay simply use the road as a waste dump. This not only causes conflict among the residents, but spreads disease.

John and his neighbours are not alone in their plight. In its 2004 State of the Lagos Megacity Report, the state government noted that essential services of treated water, storm water drainage, usable roads, reliable electricity and area-wide solid waste removal and disposal are grossly inadequate.

"Urban infrastructure facilities have not been able to keep pace with metropolitan growth and the consequent unplanned expansion. The deplorable environment in which a large proportion of residents lives is greatly exacerbated during the rainy season – about eight months each year – during which several areas are flooded. At this time, many households are forced to live in damp, waterlogged buildings and wade in knee-deep in floodwaters, live in extreme conditions, or, vacate their homes.

"While all houses in the high-income areas enjoy piped water supplies, residents in the lower-income neighbourhoods depend mainly on water from private wells. Where they do not have access to wells, they are forced to rely on local entrepreneurs who sell water at rates considered exploitative."

Such concerns have also been at the centre of global efforts over the past five years. Indeed, sub-Saharan Africa had the largest proportion of its urban population resident in slums – nearly 72 percent by the year 2001.

At the Millennium Summit in 2000, therefore, world leaders committed themselves to launch a concerted attack on poverty, illiteracy, hunger, unsafe water, disease and urban and environmental degradation by adopting a set of eight goals. Target 11 of Millennium Development Goal 7 seeks to improve the living conditions of at least 100 million slum dwellers by the year 2020, while Target 10 of MDG 7 sets out to reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water by the year 2015.

But the task then, as it is now, is intimidating. The frustrations encountered by city managers in their quest to improve living standards by meeting the provisions of the MDG targets have been as worrisome at the city level as they have been on the global front.

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For instance, a UN-HABITAT Liveability Rating conducted in 1996 by the ranked Lagos lowest of the 114 global cities surveyed. A similar study in 2001 still placed Lagos in 22nd place out of 23 cities ranked according

to their City Development Index. Also, although city specific statistics are not generally available, local indicators place life expectancy at birth for families like John's at around 52 years, much in line with the national level.

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***Journalists around the world are encouraged to write similar stories about meeting the MDGs in their own cities about slum upgrading.***

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