



# Assessment of the Challenges and Opportunities Associated with Urbanization and Human Security in Nigeria

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## Abstract

Urbanization is the hallmark of modern nation states especially in Africa and Nigeria. While urbanization changes peoples' fortunes, much is still undesired due to the woven challenges associated with it. The main objective of this study is to examine the challenges and opportunities associated with urbanization in relation to human security in Nigeria. Literature was reviewed logically in line with the study objectives, the Environmental Security Theory was adopted for the study. Methodologically, the study is a conceptual paper hence, secondary data were drawn from extant literature. The study concludes that rapid urbanization has in Nigeria has transformed the national landscape and create social and economic opportunities for Nigerians no doubt, but the negative side of rapid urbanization is being underestimated in the country. Consequently, urbanization has continued to affect the cultural values, environmental safety and threatens agricultural production resultantly, this has led to frequent security threats with farmers and herders killing one another across the country. hence, members of many rural communities do not feel safe live and invest in capital projects in their home town leading to business collapse, poor governance and spread of poverty. It is in view of the foregoing that this study has recommended that urbanization efforts should be matched with conservative drive to enable members of the rural community maintain their sources of livelihood while embracing the changes that urbanization offered them. This government need to assist waring groups in redefining their trade and live styles across that country.

**Keywords:** Human Security, Security, Urbanization & Challenges

## I. INTRODUCTION

Urbanization has emerged as one of the most transformative phenomena of the 20th and 21st centuries, profoundly reshaping socio-economic and environmental landscapes globally. By 2008, more

than half of the world's population resided in urban areas for the first time, and this proportion is projected to reach 68% by 2050 (United Nations, 2018). In Africa, urbanization has accelerated markedly since the post-colonial era, leading to significant shifts in the continent's demographic and socio-economic fabric. The urban population in Africa surged from an estimated 28 million in the 1950s to over 125 million by the 1980s, with projections suggesting it could reach 2 billion by 2030 (World Bank, 1986; van Ginkel, 2008). This rapid urban expansion is driven by aspirations for modernization, with cities perceived as engines of economic growth and improved living standards through enhanced access to opportunities and services (Churchwell, 2021). However, the anticipated benefits of urbanization, such as industrialization and economic prosperity, have not been evenly realized across the continent.

In Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, urbanization rates are among the highest on the continent. Cities like Lagos, Kano, and Abuja are experiencing unprecedented population growth. Abuja, established as the capital in 1991, was designed to accommodate future growth with an estimated capacity of around 3 million residents by 2010 (Adama, 2020). Yet, the city's population has surged to over 6 million, creating numerous human security challenges. Urban growth in Nigeria is primarily driven by demographic factors, with cities such as Lagos experiencing an annual urban growth rate of 5.8% (Mabogunje, 2015). Despite this rapid expansion, the socio-economic benefits have been uneven, with significant urban health crises emerging. Issues such as inadequate access to clean water, sanitation problems, the proliferation of informal settlements, and congested transport systems have become prevalent (Bocquier, 2008). The unplanned and uncontrolled nature of this urban growth has led to the proliferation of slums and informal settlements lacking basic amenities and infrastructure (Mabogunje, 2015; Bocquier, 2008).



In Abuja, the rapid increase in population has resulted in the spread of informal settlements on the city's periphery. These areas often suffer from inadequate infrastructure and services, including clean water, sanitation, and electricity. The absence of secure land tenure exacerbates residents' vulnerability, making them susceptible to forced evictions and significant health hazards due to overcrowded conditions (UN-Habitat, 2015; Adama, 2020). Moreover, the growing divide between rich and poor in these urban areas has intensified social issues, such as increased crime and violence, which further undermines human security and hampers development efforts (Eyita-Okon, 2022). Rising living costs in cities push low-income individuals to the peripheries, where they establish informal settlements with limited access to essential services like electricity and clean water (Bocquier, 2008). This situation exacerbates poverty and heightens vulnerability to health crises, as demonstrated by recent global health challenges. Consequently, this spur the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the African Union's Agenda 2063 directed towards address these challenges, emphasizing the need for sustainable, resilient, and inclusive cities (United Nations, 2019; African Union, 2021). Goal 11 of the SDGs highlights the importance of making cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable by tackling issues such as inadequate housing, poor infrastructure, and environmental degradation. It is given the foregoing that this paper will examine the challenges and opportunities associated with urbanization in relation to human security in Nigeria.

## **II. Statement of the Problem**

Urbanization in Nigeria, similar to many developing countries, has accelerated dramatically over recent decades, driven primarily by population growth, rural-to-urban migration, and the concentration of economic activities in urban centers (UN-Habitat, 2014; World Bank, 2016). While urbanization is often seen as a catalyst for economic development, technological advancement, and social progress, it also presents a host of challenges that threaten human security, particularly when growth is rapid, poorly managed, and lacks comprehensive planning (Agunbiade & Olajide, 2016; Akinola, 2018).

Previous studies have investigated the effects of urbanization on economic security, with findings suggesting that while urbanization can create employment opportunities, it often exacerbates income inequality and job insecurity. Economic security is a major area affected by urbanization.

Urban centers are typically viewed as engines of economic activity, offering increased employment opportunities and the potential for improved livelihoods. However, the benefits of urban growth are not evenly distributed across the population. Several studies indicate that while urbanization can lead to job creation, it also exacerbates income inequality and job insecurity, particularly in informal sectors where employment is unstable and poorly paid (Ajaero & Onokala, 2013; Olaniyan & Okemakinde, 2019). This widening economic disparity contributes to social unrest and undermines the overall stability of urban areas (Oyeleye, 2013).

Environmental concerns are another critical challenge associated with urbanization. The rapid expansion of urban areas often outpaces the development of essential infrastructure, leading to significant environmental degradation. Existing research highlights issues such as poor housing conditions, inadequate waste management, increased pollution, and limited access to clean water and sanitation, all of which pose serious threats to human health and safety (Adedeji et al., 2014; Olorunfemi, 2017). For instance, the unplanned nature of many Nigerian cities has resulted in the proliferation of slums and informal settlements, where residents are exposed to hazardous living conditions (Ibem, 2011). These environmental challenges not only degrade the quality of urban life but also have far-reaching impacts on public health, contributing to the spread of diseases and exacerbating the vulnerability of urban populations (Ezeh et al., 2017).

Social implications of urbanization are equally significant. As cities grow, they often experience rising crime rates, deteriorating public health systems, and weakened social cohesion. Urbanization can strain public services and infrastructure, leading to overcrowded schools, hospitals, and public transportation systems (Agbola & Agunbiade, 2007). Moreover, the rapid pace of urban growth disrupts traditional community structures, leading to social fragmentation and increased criminal activity (Adegoke, 2018). The stress associated with urban living, compounded by limited access to healthcare and social services, can result in declining public health outcomes, further weakening the social fabric of urban communities (Okeke, 2016).

However, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding the interconnectedness of these issues within the Nigerian context. Few studies have comprehensively examined how the economic, environmental, and social dimensions of urbanization collectively influence human security in Nigeria.



### **Research questions**

What are the major challenges of urbanization on human security in Abuja?

What the opportunities associated with urbanization and human security in Abuja

### **Objectives of the study**

The main objective of this study is to examine the challenges and opportunities associated with urbanization in relation to human security in Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

- i. Determine the major challenges of urbanization on human security in Abuja
- ii. Determine the opportunity associated with urbanization in Abuja

### **Conceptual Clarification**

#### **Urbanization**

Urbanization refers to the gradual shift in population from rural to urban areas, leading to a decrease in rural populations. This multifaceted process involves demographic, economic, political, and cultural changes. Urbanization is a global phenomenon driven by factors like economic growth, industrialization, globalization, and migration (Batty, 2018). According to Batty (2018), the roots of urbanization can be traced back to ancient civilizations such as Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome, where early cities emerged as hubs of trade, culture, and power. However, it was the Industrial Revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries that significantly accelerated urbanization in Europe and North America, as people moved from rural areas to cities to work in factories and mills. One major consequence of urbanization is the transformation of urban spaces. As cities expand, they consume more land and resources, altering landscapes and natural environments. This can lead to biodiversity loss, increased pollution, and climate change (McGranahan & Satterthwaite, 2014). Additionally, urbanization impacts the social fabric of communities, bringing together people from diverse backgrounds and lifestyles, which fosters new forms of interaction (Florida, 2002). Today, urbanization remains a significant global trend, with over half of the world's population now residing in urban areas (United Nations, 2018). While urbanization has provided benefits like better access to education, healthcare, and employment, it has also created challenges such as overcrowding, environmental degradation, and social inequality (Adepoju, 2004). In this context, urbanization, refers to the rapid and expansive growth of urban areas, leading to significant shifts in population distribution, social structures, and economic systems. This process can strain resources and infrastructure, exacerbate

inequalities, and heighten vulnerabilities in areas such as housing, employment, healthcare, and public safety.

### **Human Security**

Human security is a relatively new framework for understanding global security challenges, emerging as a response to the limitations of traditional state-centric approaches that often overlook the complex and interconnected issues faced by individuals and communities. At its core, human security focuses on the protection and empowerment of people, rather than just states or territories. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defines human security as "a condition that results from the protection and promotion of human rights, as well as the availability of basic necessities, such as food, shelter, and health care" (UNDP, 1994). Essentially, human security aims to ensure that all individuals have access to the resources and opportunities necessary to live fulfilling lives free from violence, oppression, and poverty. Since the end of the Cold War, the United Nations has adopted human security as a guiding principle for the international community (Elisher, 2018). The UN views it as instrumental in helping member states identify and address widespread and crosscutting challenges to the survival, livelihood, and dignity of their people. The approach calls for people-centered, comprehensive, context-specific, and prevention-oriented responses that enhance the protection and empowerment of all individuals (United Nations, 2018). Scholars and policymakers have defined and applied human security in various ways, with some focusing on specific issues such as conflict prevention, environmental sustainability, or economic development, while others see it as a broader framework that connects different forms of insecurity, including political, economic, social, and environmental factors.

### **Theoretical framework: Environmental Security Theory**

Environmental Security Theory explores the intersections between environmental conditions and human security, emphasizing how environmental factors impact social stability, economic well-being, and safety. This theory asserts that environmental degradation, resource scarcity, and ecological disruptions are not just issues of environmental concern but are integral to understanding and ensuring human security. At its core, Environmental Security Theory posits that the environment plays a critical role in maintaining human well-being and societal stability. It argues that when environmental



conditions deteriorate—whether through pollution, deforestation, climate change, or resource depletion—these changes can lead to a range of security challenges. For example, environmental degradation can exacerbate conflicts over scarce resources, such as water and arable land, leading to competition and potentially violent disputes. This perspective highlights how environmental issues can directly threaten security by creating tensions and conflicts within and between communities (Boas, 2016).

The theory also addresses how environmental changes can impact human health and safety. For instance, poor air quality, water contamination, and increased incidence of natural disasters due to climate change can lead to significant public health crises. Environmental Security Theory thus connects the dots between environmental conditions and health outcomes, emphasizing that deteriorating environmental quality can undermine health security and increase vulnerability to diseases (Barnett et al., 2009).

Another important aspect of Environmental Security Theory is its focus on the role of environmental management and policy in mitigating security risks. Effective management of natural resources and environmental protection are seen as crucial for preventing and addressing the security implications of environmental degradation. This includes implementing sustainable practices, promoting resilience to environmental shocks, and ensuring equitable access to resources to prevent conflicts (Homer-Dixon, 1999).

Firstly, as urban areas expand rapidly, they often experience increased environmental stressors such as air and water pollution, inadequate waste management, and loss of green spaces. These environmental issues can undermine public health and safety, leading to significant human security concerns. By applying Environmental Security Theory, the study can explore how these environmental changes directly impact the well-being of urban populations, highlighting the connections between environmental degradation and human health risks, such as respiratory diseases and waterborne illnesses.

Secondly, the theory emphasizes the link between environmental resource scarcity and social conflict. Urbanization frequently intensifies competition for resources like clean water and arable land, which can exacerbate tensions and potentially lead to conflicts within urban areas. The theory provides a framework for examining how resource pressures caused by urban growth can contribute to social instability and conflict, thus affecting overall

human security. Additionally, Environmental Security Theory underscores the importance of effective environmental management and policy in mitigating security risks. By focusing on sustainable urban planning and resource management, the theory offers insights into how proactive measures can help prevent or alleviate the negative impacts of urbanization on human security. This can guide the development of policies and practices aimed at enhancing environmental resilience and reducing vulnerabilities in urban settings.

### **Empirical review on the challenges and opportunities of urbanization**

Eyita-Okon (2022) analyzed urbanization and human security trends in Africa, highlighting key issues such as urban growth rates, quality of life in informal settlements and slums, and the proportion of urban populations living in slums. The study reveals that despite national efforts across the continent, challenges like poor coordination, systemic violence, external influences on Africa's development, and gaps in policy implementation hinder effective responses to the human security risks posed by urbanization. Akiyode (2012) examined Lagos, Nigeria, as a case study to assess the impacts of urbanization on human security in a developing mega-city. The study, focusing on environmental security, highlights the adverse effects of rapid urban growth on human security. Hove et al. (2013) argue that accelerated urbanization has intensified demand for essential services such as water, sanitation, education, and health, but the supply of these services has lagged behind. Poorly managed urban growth has led to increased pollution and environmental degradation, which threaten sustainable development, human security, and peace. Güneralp et al. (2017) aimed to identify the key challenges and opportunities presented by the growth of cities in Africa for conservation goals. While many studies have addressed the impacts of urbanization on conservation, they often focus on specific issues. This study synthesizes existing research and adds new analysis, highlighting that while urban expansion threatens ecosystems and biodiversity, it also offers opportunities for conservation. Growing urban populations, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, strain inadequate infrastructure and introduce new governance challenges. However, Africa's ecosystems could support green infrastructure to benefit urban populations while protecting biodiversity. Despite worsening social problems overshadowing biodiversity concerns, promising initiatives are emerging to address the social,



institutional, and ecological challenges of urbanization.

Paraušić (2021) examines the connection between contemporary urbanization challenges and human security and sustainable development. The paper argues that rapid urbanization directly impacts human security and sustainability. Weak projections and inadequate planning have undermined environmental security and the sustainability of urban centers in developing countries. Continuous urbanization subjects urban societies to various problems and hazards, potentially hindering access to socio-economic and human development benefits.

Akintunde et al. (2022) explored the impact of urbanization on health and life expectancy of urban dwellers using primary data collected through telephone interviews with urban studies scholars, public health educators, social workers, and epidemiologists, supplemented by existing literature. The study found persistent urban environmental problems, including inadequate water and sanitation, high infant mortality, poor waste disposal, and industrial pollution, contributing to respiratory infections and other health issues. These findings highlight the detrimental effects of socio-economic factors on health and life expectancy in urban areas.

Barnett (2007) integrates research on the vulnerability of local areas and social groups to climate change, the relationship between livelihoods and violent conflict, and the role of the state in development and peacemaking. The paper highlights how climate change undermines human security by degrading natural resources essential for sustaining livelihoods and weakening state capacities to provide necessary services. These direct and indirect impacts can, in certain circumstances, increase the risk of violent conflict.

Awasthi (2021) explores the relationship between urbanization, internal migration, and associated challenges in health, education, employment, natural resources, and security. The paper employs Culture of Poverty and Social Disorganization theories to discuss the integration challenges faced by migrants in urban areas, revealing that rural-urban migration threatens public security. It argues that urban aggression and transgression create an environment of fear and stress, impacting sustainable economic growth and human rights, while acknowledging that poor migrants with low social capital are not solely to blame.

Okoyede et al. (2021) examine the relationship between human security and socio-economic development in Ilorin metropolis. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires

and personal interviews, while secondary data were sourced from published documents and relevant literature. The study uses Z-score, Lorenz curve, and regression analyses, finding that current adaptive and institutional strategies are insufficient. The analysis reveals an 18% disparity in socio-economic development, with many respondents struggling to meet basic needs under socially acceptable standards. Ohwo et al. (2015) review the environmental impacts of urbanization in Nigeria, noting its profound effects on air, water, and land. Urbanization has led to significant environmental problems such as pollution, deforestation, wetland destruction, erosion, flooding, and urban sprawl. These issues threaten environmental sustainability and human health, highlighting the urgent need for effective management to support both human well-being and ecosystem integrity. The reviewed literature reveals several gaps in understanding the challenges and opportunities associated with urbanization in relation to human security. While studies like Barnett (2007) connect climate change with human security, they do not fully explore how urbanization interacts with climate change to amplify or mitigate these effects. There is also a lack of longitudinal research tracking the evolution of urbanization impacts over time and evaluating long-term trends. The literature highlights inadequate policies and planning (Eyita-Okon, 2022; Paraušić, 2021), yet does not provide detailed assessments of successful or failed interventions. Social integration and equity issues, especially for marginalised communities, are insufficiently explored (Awasthi, 2021). Furthermore, while some studies mention conservation opportunities within urban growth (Güneralp et al., 2017), practical strategies for integrating green infrastructure are lacking. Health interventions remain underexplored (Akintunde et al., 2022), and there is limited analysis of how urbanization exacerbates socio-economic disparities (Okoyede et al., 2021). Addressing these gaps could offer a more comprehensive understanding of urbanization's impact on human security and lead to more effective management strategies.

### **The environmental implications of urbanization**

Aliyu et al. (2017) highlighted that urbanization in Nigeria is advancing rapidly, with cities like Lagos experiencing an annual urban growth rate of 5.8%. This demographic-driven urban expansion often lacks corresponding socioeconomic benefits, leading to significant urban health challenges such as inadequate water supply, squalid living conditions, poor sanitation, ineffective waste management, and overcrowded, unsafe transport



systems. While careful management of urbanization has the potential to alleviate hardship and suffering, it can also exacerbate poverty and squalor if not properly addressed. Ohwo et al. (2015) reviewed the environmental impacts of urbanization in Nigeria, noting that urbanization profoundly affects major environmental components—air, water, and land. Daily anthropogenic activities and resource exploitation have led to severe environmental problems, including pollution, deforestation, wetland destruction, erosion, flooding, urban sprawl, and the development of slums. These issues threaten environmental sustainability and could undermine the environment's capacity to support life if not effectively managed, posing serious risks to both human health and the broader ecosystem. Akpan-Ebe et al. (2016) aimed to identify the ecological consequences of urbanization in Uyo, the capital of Akwa Ibom State. Utilizing GIS, physical observations, and field sampling, the study found significant changes in vegetation cover and land use patterns due to increasing residential and built-up areas. The ecological impacts include heightened waste generation, increased flooding and erosion, air pollution, and contamination of water and sediments.

### III. Conclusion/Recommendations

The study concludes that rapid urbanization has in Nigeria has transformed the national landscape and create social and economic opportunities for Nigerians no doubt but the negative side of rapid urbanization is being under estimated in the country. Consequently, urbanization has continued to affect the cultural values, environmental safety and threatens agricultural production resultantly, this has led to frequent security threats with farmers and herders killing one another across the country. hence, members of many rural communities do not feel safe live and invest in capital projects in their home town leading to business collapse, poor governance and spread of poverty. It is in view of the foregoing that this study has recommended that urbanization efforts should be matched with conservative drive to enable members of the rural community maintain their sources of livelihood while embracing the changes that urbanization offered them. This government need to assist waring groups in redefining their trade and live styles across that country.

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