

Lagos development vision leaves the citizens behind

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Summary

Lagos was selected as one of the case study cities for the [African Cities Research Consortium](#) (ACRC) – a multi-city project which brings together researchers, community organisations and practitioners. ACRC presents an opportunity to work together to achieve a shared understanding of the political economy of African cities, in order to identify and address the critical challenges cities are facing. Our aim is to generate robust insights and evidence that will help improve living conditions, service delivery and life chances for all city residents, with a particular focus on disadvantaged communities.

In Lagos, the [domains](#) of interest are [structural transformation](#), [safety and security](#), [neighbourhood and district economic development](#) and [housing](#). The city systems under interrogation include transport, healthcare, education, waste management, energy, water and sanitation, as well as food distribution, finance, ICT and law and order.

This research brief summarises the central themes emerging from preliminary research findings conducted by ACRC's team in Lagos. It is further informed by initial engagements with multi-sectoral stakeholders across government, academia,



media, private sector, civil society and local community groups in Nigeria.

Introduction

Recently, the Lagos State government has championed for a Smart City vision, geared towards making Lagos [“Africa’s model megacity”](#) and its premier destination for international investment. This vision has resulted in a series of governance reforms, regulatory and legislative frameworks, projects and interventions. These have focused on transforming Lagos into a 21st century economy and a centre for digital enterprise and commerce, as well as a hub for urban infrastructure and innovation.

Significant investments have been made in transport infrastructure, industrial zones, technology and broadband infrastructure across the state. Research by the ACRC Lagos team reveals that these investments have brought mixed results, with successes, failures and some unintended consequences.



The increasing adoption of technology to leapfrog development, for example, indicates a modicum of success in policy adoption. However, insights from ongoing research point to limited success, or in some cases reversed development for intended beneficiaries.

In many cases, local peculiarities are overlooked in the deployment of technology options. Most striking is the neglect of informal systems and citizen-led initiatives that are already being deployed to bridge infrastructure and governance gaps, and which form the fulcrum of the city's daily life. The policies of the government are, to a large extent, not led by evidence or community need; rather, they are pro-formal business and investor driven. There is a need to support the interplay between the city's formal and informal sectors through the recognition and integration of local initiatives.

Ongoing research also indicates that there is a huge deficit of impactful development for a majority of citizens. This is largely as a result of the emerging technology-dependent and transformative model adopted by the government. This model is not informed by localised data or evidence and lacks a nuanced understanding of the city's development processes and factors influencing them.

Preliminary findings from ACRC research

Governance

- There are **conflicting rationalities regarding the roles of the state** as regulator and as an interested service provider, especially in transport and land.
- There are **significant demand and supply deficits in urban infrastructure provisioning and quality service delivery**, especially in electricity, food distribution, water and sanitation sectors.
- There are **irregularities in the roles of various governance institutions**, especially those of the community development associations. This is due to the absence or sub-par performance of local government and the usurpation of local government roles by the state government, as well as tensions between federal and state government roles, in light of Lagos' former status as federal capital of Nigeria.
- There are issues around **dependency on food supply chains from areas outside Lagos**, with far-reaching implications on the city's food security, coupled with the ethnic nuances that result in unresolved tensions in market politics, community safety and access to urban resources.
- The influences of **land-holding families and land contestations/spatial (re)configurations** have resulted in forced displacements, gentrification and urban fragmentation across socioeconomic indicators.

Economic development

- There is a need to **recognise and integrate the formal and informal systems in an interdependent value chain**, given the dominance of informal actors across most city systems.
- Increasingly, **demand and supply deficits are growing in the business ecosystem**, as a result of nuanced influences and/or interests – such as the

growth of online microlenders sponsored by Chinese interests, and the institutionalisation of violence in public transport administrative structures.

- **Technology can be seen as either an opportunity or a threat**, given the widespread poverty and the fluid governance models of regulation.
- There is **poor public accountability and lack of access to open data** across various government sectors.
- **Elite capture and the rise of neoliberal governance regimes** – as well as the increasing commodification of urban services and commonwealth – bring to the fore **ongoing debates around city for profit vs city for people narratives**, and the extent to which various infrastructure reforms are fit for purpose.

Safety, security and access to justice

- **Nigeria can be classified as a pseudo-military government**, with implications for security infrastructure at the city level. Recurrent tensions in the layered (federal–state–local) authorities that oversee policing and maintenance of safety and security are notable, which have also cascaded into debate on the relevance of the state police.
- **A better understanding of the stakeholders involved in informal safety and security provision is needed**, as well as opportunities for scaling up community governance.
- **Tensions exist around access to justice, especially for low-income urban residents** – who make up a dominant proportion of Lagos residents – and the conflicting role of the rule of law as extremely punitive or deterrent. Consequently, a deficit in public trust permeates practically all city systems.
- **Geospatial dynamics influence violence/security/crime hotspotting and vulnerability to crime and disaster.**

Intersecting issues

- **Global concerns – such as climate change, Covid-19 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – are resulting in local changes**, including the effects of climate change on flooding; migration waves and their social consequences; and food security.
- **Migration has overarching consequences for displacement, new slums and the proportion of out-of-school children**, and there are clear data gaps around migration rates and trajectories.
- **Youth is a key intersecting issue and has implications for underemployment, unemployment and lack of opportunities**, as well as for political contestations and innovation.



Conclusion

These findings are being interrogated further as research progresses. They will cascade into the identification of priority complex problems (PCPs) that have an overarching influence on the functioning of the city. There will be additional engagement on how to collaboratively address them through strengthening existing formal and informal systems of governance across various city systems and domains.

Further reading

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About this brief

This brief was produced by the Lagos uptake team of the African Cities Research Consortium (ACRC). Visit the website for further information on the ACRC research programme: www.african-cities.org. For Lagos-related issues, please contact the city lead, Professor Taibat Lawanson (tlawanson@unilag.edu.ng).

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