

## **Complex and multiple realities: understanding poverty and vulnerability context in Lagos informal settlements**

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Vulnerability has been identified as a major hindrance to sustainable livelihood, social and economic development and poverty alleviation. The concept of vulnerability has evolved over the years and it has been applied in various disciplines. For examples, it has been widely applied in the fields of natural hazards climate change and poverty and sustainable livelihoods. This paper focuses on vulnerability from poverty and sustainable livelihoods perspective. DFID (1999) defines vulnerability as trends, shocks and seasonality, which people have limited or no control over, but affect their livelihoods. Vulnerability consists of two sides – external and internal. The external side consists of risks, shocks and stress to which an individual is subject to, while the internal side refers to a lack of means to cope with risks, shocks and stress (Chambers, 1989).

This paper examines the vulnerability contexts within which the residents of informal settlements pursue their livelihood and what they are vulnerable to. The theoretical underpinnings of this research are, first, that the urban poor pursue their livelihoods within multiple and complex vulnerability contexts, which exacerbate their poverty. Second, it is theorised, that vulnerability is closely linked to asset ownership. The poor are particularly vulnerable because they have limited assets to cope with shocks and to build a sustainable livelihood.

This paper is based on a larger research work which explored the complexity of factors which influence the livelihoods of the residents of informal settlements in Lagos. The study adopts multiple case study research design, with an in-depth study of four informal settlements. The study is based on both quantitative and qualitative data collected through household surveys, interviews, direct observation and published documents. The conceptual and analytical framework adopted was based on Moser's

Assets Vulnerability Framework and the DFID Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF), with a focus on the assets and vulnerability components.

The analysis of the asset component (human, social, physical, financial and natural) indicates that the residents of the case study settlements have limited and unbalanced asset portfolios. This is an indication of internal vulnerability with implications on the external factors that cause vulnerability. An analysis of the vulnerability component reveals that the residents of the case study settlements face complex and multiple vulnerabilities. The identified vulnerabilities were carefully categorised and discussed along three main themes – trends, shocks and seasonality. Analysis of the trends indicates that there is a complex interaction between external (macro) factors and internal (micro) factors which frame individual's or household's vulnerability context. Though trends occur at macro level, they have serious influence on livelihoods at micro level. The prevailing socio-economic, political and physical environments have implications on the livelihoods of the residents of informal settlements in Lagos. These trends are associated with population growth and urbanisation, macroeconomic, governance and physical contexts. Shocks involve uncertainty, and hinder sustainable livelihood. Both the generic and context-specific shocks were analysed. The analysis reveals an array of livelihood shocks, which the residents of the case study settlements experience. These include insecurity of tenure and forced evictions, homelessness and poor housing condition, high cost of accommodation relative to income, inadequate infrastructure and urban services, flood hazards, unemployment and employment insecurity, poor environmental condition, violence and crime, food insecurity and hunger, and ill health. This paper moves further to summarise drivers of identified shocks as location, inadequate infrastructure and inefficient land and planning regulatory frameworks and poor political economy and governance system. Seasonality is associated with fluctuation and increase in food prices, particularly during festive periods, seasonality in informal sector employment, seasonal threat of forced eviction and displacement, particularly during the rainy season and seasonal outbreak of disease resulting from flood hazards.

Based on these various dimensions of vulnerability, this paper concludes that the urban poor are faced with an overlay of vulnerabilities, which perpetually trap them in poverty.

It went further to say that vulnerability is a function of both macro and micro factors, which manifest from political, social, economic and physical environments, and individuals' asset portfolios. They reinforce one another to perpetually create a situation of livelihood insecurity for the urban poor in informal settlements. This, on one hand, reinforces the argument that vulnerability of the urban poor goes beyond issues associated with tenure insecurity. On the other hand, an understanding of the complex and multiple realities of the urban poor is important for developing an effective and sustainable poverty alleviation strategy inadequate. The paper recommends policy reforms in the areas of infrastructure provision, land policy and planning regulatory framework and governance system to enable the poor to move from the state of livelihood vulnerability to livelihoods security. The starting point will be that the poor are able to accumulate a wide range of assets and reduce multiple vulnerability. This will require a supportive context that enables institutions to accommodate and support the livelihoods of the poor, create opportunities for the poor to build on their strengths. This will only be possible within the context of good governance.

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