

RELIGIOUS URBANISATION IN AFRICA **URBAN** **PLANNING** **PERSPECTIVES**

Lagos research team policy brief, January 2019

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ABOUT THE RUA PROJECT

In recent years, the economic and social impact of religious actors and faith-based groups have been significant, in particular in large cities of the developing world. However this phenomenon has remained largely under-researched. In some contexts, for instance in African 'mega-cities', religious groups have been at the forefront of development initiatives often involving the creation of alternative urban spaces and large infrastructure and buildings providing key services in health care or education. In often difficult, informal and unstable urban environments do these religious spaces solve or exacerbate everyday problems faced by residents? How are religious groups reimagining the city they are shaping and transforming? Funded by the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) through the British Academy, the RUA Project addresses these questions using a mixed methodology combining qualitative and quantitative research. Our project involves three groups of actors – development and urban experts, local residents living around key religious sites, and religious actors/institutions.

The research is conducted in two of the fastest growing cities in Africa – Lagos and Kinshasa. To explore the impact of religious urbanisation and provide both an evidence-base and practical recommendations aimed at promoting functioning civic urban culture our project includes three dedicated research work packages and one policy work package.

The first Work Package is concerned with the production and use of religious urban space in Lagos and Kinshasa, and the intersections between religious urban developments, infrastructures and the provision of utilities. The second Work Package investigates religious notions of the 'ideal city' in Lagos and Kinshasa and ways in which such notions become translated within each actually existing city. We consider how models of infrastructural development mobilised by religious actors are brought into tension with existing regimes of planning. We consider ideals of belonging and citizenship promoted by religious actors at local, national and transnational levels. The third Work Package explores how religion responds to the unpredictability and informality of everyday life in Lagos and Kinshasa. It is concerned with unravelling the complex moral economies deployed in the production and use of religious urban infrastructures. Of interest are the levels of trust that urban dwellers place in religious infrastructures and how this compares with trust in state institutions. To what extent do religious institutions provide symbolic and material resources to negotiate unpredictability and socio-economic uncertainties through production of urban/infrastructural space?

One of the project's key objectives is to provide recommendations aimed at promoting civic urban culture in context of growing inequalities and widespread informalisation of urban life in cities where religious actors play significant infrastructural roles.

You can find more information on our project here: <https://rua-project.ac.uk/>



URBAN PLANNING AND RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT

The influence of religious organisations and their activities on the emerging urban form and urban processes in Lagos is unquestionable. Based on a series of workshops, interviews and field observations, the following recommendations are outlined by the Lagos Research Team. They represent the findings of the RUA research project from the perspective of urban development planning. This study was conducted by a team of urban planning researchers of the University of Lagos in 2018 and draws on various sources of information including literature review, case studies, interviews and workshop data.

The following are a tabular representation of the broad findings of the workshops, interviews, case studies and our professional understanding of the interplay of religious organisations and urban planning and development in Lagos. The emergent issues, in which religious organisations play an 'interventionist' role, are identified, after which policy recommendations are introduced on how to effectively respond to the issues highlighted. As many of these recommendations respond to multiple highlighted issues, they are discussed broadly under the following sub-headings:

- i Town planning reforms
- ii Local government reforms¹
- iii Co-production of urban services

The actors responsible for implementation are identified as:

- i The Lagos state government
- ii Policy makers
- iii Local governments
- iv Town Planning Agencies: Lagos state Ministry of Physical Planning and Urban Development and her affiliate agencies including Lagos State Urban Renewal Agency
- v Religious organisations
- vi Knowledge institutions

	Emergent issue	Religious organisation	Policy recommendation	Implementing organisation
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Uncoordinated bureaucratic structure of planning regulatory framework - Poor infrastructure outlay and infrastructural deficit - Lack of development plans - Transport and traffic challenges <p>These challenges were generally identified by various categories of stakeholders during interviews and workshops.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enclaves - Targeted construction based on local needs and relevance to religious sites - Religious organisations take advantage of the gaps in planning - Top down approach to development - Religion as 'elitism' (professional networking and influence peddling) - Traffic management and road construction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Formal partnership with religious organisations for local community development for targeted regulated interventions - Establishing codes and development guide for religious land use to incorporate minimum and maximum limit of land area that can be acquired for religious uses in an area. Essentially, this can be achieved through a review of the state planning and development control regulations. Also important is the need for a review of the Land Use Act of 1978. This is, however, an issue of constitutional amendment, as the Act is entrenched in the constitution. We acknowledge that this is challenging, as it would involve political and legal debates. - Strengthening town planning regulations and enforcement mechanisms. - Zoning and building codes need to respond to current realities - Holistic planning approach. Traffic and transportation management especially for special events of religious organisations along Lagos-Ibadan expressway. Since the axis is within the jurisdictions of Ogun State and Lagos State, Ogun State government will need to complement the effort of the Lagos State Traffic Management Authority. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local government - Town planning agencies - Religious organisations - Regional development agencies <p>The methods of disseminating these recommendations to the appropriate stakeholders, as generally suggested by research participants, will include media, policy brief and stakeholders' engagement through workshops and seminars.</p>

¹ The Local Government reforms of 1976 establish in clear terms what responsibilities the local authorities should undertake of which some urban planning responsibilities are inclusive. Many religious organisations are currently carrying out activities that are under the constitutional mandate of the local government, hence the need to strengthen that level of government.

	Emergent issue	Religious organisation	Policy recommendation	Implementing organisation
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Land acquisition and religious urbanisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Religious organisations promote gentrification and land and property acquisition in built up areas such as Ilupeju, Onike and areas around the Deeper Life settlement. This is particularly evidenced in the case of MFM, at its headquarters in Iwaya, where the church has bought most of the properties in the area and has dramatically impacted the local community. RCCG, at its redemption camp, is exhibiting similar features. - Erosion of public space/accessible spaces such as playgrounds - Spatial segregations purely along religious lines eg MFM vs NASFAT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Land use planning and exploring organised religious tourism opportunities in Lagos –Ibadan axis with temporal and spatial regulations - Strengthening land use layout approval processes and enforcement laws 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Town Planning Agencies - Policy makers/ Legislature - State Government - Religious organisations
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social interventions in low income areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Subsidised social services are better than general hospitals, and more affordable than private ones - Partnership between faith-based organisations in local communities (such as that between Elevation Church and St Kizito clinic in Jakande) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Urbanisation at scale - Horizontal partnerships with other faith-based organisations 	
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tensions between service provision and access - Tensions between church use and residential land uses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who has access and who is excluded? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explore opportunities to open up the space for inclusive development - Government interventions to ensure religious organisations continue to offer not-for-profit services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - State government
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Religious territorial 'vision' leading to potential land grabbing - Lack of access to public spaces due to gentrification – Churches as one of the agents of gentrification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inequality in access to land - Planning and land use contraventions and access to public spaces - Mobility of the displaced poor - Churches privatising outdoor recreational space and wider public space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strengthen planning enforcement regulations - Explore opportunities inherent in the resilience of the informal sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Planning Authority

URBAN PLANNING AND RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT (CONT)

	Emergent issue	Religious organisation	Policy recommendation	Implementing organisation
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gendered challenges of urbanisation - Women bear a heavier burden from challenges of urban life and poverty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gender dimensions - Targeted evangelism of women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Incorporate gender equity in urban planning and women and child friendly city development strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Urban designers/planners
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tensions between church 'visioning' and urban planning legislative framework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - RCCG 'grid' expansion model may, on some occasions, contravene urban planning rules (regulations based on population threshold or minimum distance to accessible infrastructure or between places of worship). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explore alternative/multiple use of public building such as schools, event centres and hotels - Develop (often already existing) virtual religious services and e-services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business community/ churches/government
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dominance and recurrent change of use to religious uses 	Absence of 'NIMBY' and neighbourhood advocacy	Encouraging 'right to the city' and citizen advocacy and vibrant residents' associations and access to public space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Civil society
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Socio-economic status and religiosity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Religious interventions in poor communities with low access to infrastructure 	<p>Quality of church interventions – especially health and education - should be regulated</p> <p>However there is also a great lesson to be learnt from religious organisations as some of them have successfully addressed infrastructure challenges within their 'enclaves' outside government provisions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local government
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of publicly accessible data on registration, church locations, and change of use. - Socio-economic data and church statistics 	Indicators and alignment with other socio-economic data	Opportunities for interdisciplinary research and co-production of urban solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local government - Knowledge Institutions (universities and the research community) - Religious organisations

TOWN PLANNING REFORMS

Strengthening town planning regulations and enforcement frameworks

This study reveals that religious urbanisation in Lagos is, on the whole, ambivalent and that religious organisations carry out planning activities with both positive and negative outcomes. As planning seeks to shape the urban spatial configuration and territoriality of religious activities, religious organisations also shape the urban development by leaving enduring landscape imprints in the city. Evidently, as agreed by the research participants, Lagos is rapidly exhibiting a new urban configuration driven by religious organisations, especially since the last 25 years or so. The study of Oduwaye (2013) on *Urban Planning Implications of Changing Land Use Structure of Metropolitan Lagos* supports this view and argues that FBO-related urban activities are the most prominent features of the changing cityscape of Lagos. The study further notes that while industrial land use is decreasing, alternative land uses, especially religious, are rapidly taking the place of industries. According to the study, this phenomenon, which started gradually over three decades ago, took a dramatic turn in the last 15 years or so.

On the one hand, this situation presents complex challenges for urban planning. On the other hand, the planning system and urban planning professionals are sometimes implicated in these negative outcomes. Urban planning professionals are caught in the struggles of managing unbalanced power dynamics between planning and religious organisations, with religious leadership having more influence. In some cases, professionals who are supposed to enforce planning regulations are often caught in the power dynamics of politics and planning, resulting in circumventing planning regulations to support the development aspirations of influential stakeholders.

While the majority of the interview participants, particularly urban planning professionals, acknowledged that there are existing regulations in terms of zoning and minimum land area for every urban activity, the extent to which these regulations are implemented and enforced leaves a lot to be desired. Religious organisations often take advantage of the weakness of planning and legal enforcement frameworks to actualise/formalise illegal land use conversions. Though this is not limited to religious organisations, it must be said that FBOs

are currently at the forefront of land use conversion (Oduwaye, 2013). In view of the lack of planning capacity to take effective control of urban space through monitoring and enforcement of planning regulations, religious organisations (for whom expansion is often a key element of their theological 'visions') are among the key actors shaping urban change. Therefore there is a need, from the outset, for a stricter implementation and enforcement of the existing planning regulations to address the current challenges of religious urbanisation across (and around) a city like Lagos.

Revising planning standards to regulate and accommodate religious infrastructure

Planning should be about *realities*, particularly as circumstances are bound to continually change. So, as circumstances change, planning regulations and standards must also evolve to accommodate new realities. Therefore, beyond enforcing the current regulations (which some research participants believed are too lenient towards religious organisations) there is a need for a review of the existing planning regulations, with the introduction of more stringent standards, particularly in terms of zoning and minimum land areas. One of the key stakeholders interviewed, a Lagos-based urban planner, noted that one of the best ways to control the excessive spread of places of worship was to introduce a minimum land area regulation for church development. He emphasised that a minimum land area regulation should cover and accommodate all the religious activities, including parking requirements, within the boundaries of the church premises.

Regional development to accommodate peri-urbanism and the growth of religious land uses

While in reality religious organisations are rapidly creating new conurbations and new towns, particularly in the peri-urban areas in Ogun State, the regional plans of both Lagos and Ogun states are not proactive in either adequately accommodating or reducing the rapid spread and associated land fragmentation linked to rapid religious urbanisation. Nor do they take advantage of the associated urban agglomerations and opportunities, which have largely developed outside the official land use plan.

The consequences of uncontrolled religious urbanisation could be widespread land fragmentation and disjointed development. The government, which has an institutional responsibility, needs to develop plans to harmonise the various enclaves and integrate them into the city plan. Considering the realities of the current challenges, it will require regional integration of both Lagos and Ogun states through various strategic development plans – such as a regional plan.

Preparation and implementation of different hierarchies of strategic planning is thus essential for effective land use management and coordinated development. Therefore, in addition to regional plan preparation, there is a need for the development of lower order plans making adequate provisions for religious activities. The existing development control is implemented within the context of inadequate strategic development plans – particularly lower order plans. This greatly challenges the capacity of professionals to adequately control the expansion and proliferation of places of worship. As many urban planners we talked to argue, one of the consequences of this is that there is 'development before planning' whereas there should have been 'planning before development'.

Although some of the religious organisations like RCCG and MFM are engaging in spatial and urban planning, according to some of the stakeholders we talked to what they have been able to do seem to remain located within the confines of their enclaves and surrounding environments. Moreover, many areas evidently lack planning and development guides for effective control.

It was also noted that government often claims to have development plan that are all-inclusive. The reality is that, generally, there are broad land use plans without lower order plans and lower scaled zoning. Where lower order plans exist, there have usually been deviations from the plans. It was also argued that in some cases, approvals for layouts are sought and obtained from the relevant agencies. However FBOs sometimes deviate from what was initially approved, and state planning agencies do not have monitoring jurisdiction over these development and religious enclaves.

LOCAL GOVERNANCE REFORMS

The study revealed that many of the interventions carried out by religious organisations fall within the constitutional responsibilities of the local government system. It also revealed that many local governments simply lack the capacity (technical and financial) to perform their mandates.

In some cases, religious organisations attempt to fill the service/infrastructural gaps. However, as religious organisations step in to carry out some of these urban services, many citizens are excluded. For example in our research it was often mentioned how 'road works sometimes end at the gate of the church'.

In some cases, non-members are restricted from accessing social services provided by the religious organisation. It is, therefore, recommended that the local government system be strengthened to provide services to all citizens. Rather than religious organisations performing the work of the local government, partnerships should be encouraged between local governments and religious organisations.



CO-PRODUCTION OF URBAN KNOWLEDGE AND SERVICES

The study highlighted the role of non-state actors (religious organisations in this case) in (re)shaping the city, even though the extent of these interventions is often not documented. As such, there is a need for more interdisciplinary research on religious urbanisation and the production of new knowledge on how cities are formed (and reformed) by FBOs is required. This is particularly so in African contexts where dual (formal-informal) systems exist side by side. Understanding emerging urban paradigms will allow for pragmatic interventions in terms of local economic development and community development.

Co-production of basic services is already being practiced through residents' associations and some of the religious organisations. With religious organisations going beyond 'spiritual services', and offering housing, economic and development services in a decentralised and communal way, the models derived from these communities of trust can be leveraged on to extend access to basic services to more citizens. FBOs are sometimes providing what could be called 'municipal services', and benefit from the trust of local communities whose members may be more willing to be involved as local urban citizens. We can learn from these

methodologies in expanding access to basic services to more residents. It was also noted that while some forms of religious urbanisation were limiting inclusion, the interventions of some FBOs could be characterised as non-discriminatory, showing higher levels of inclusiveness with the potential to contribute to wider community and enterprise development, for instance.



