

# BROADENING THE ECONOMIC BASE OF MEGACITIES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF LAGOS, NIGERIA

## Abstract

The number of megacities in developing countries is on the increase. Lagos is one of the megacities and is estimated to be the world's most populous city by 2100. Its economy is dependent largely on funds from federal allocation and internally generated revenue from taxes. The rapid rate of urbanisation brings about some socio-economic issues such as high rate of unemployment, criminal behaviours among the unemployed, and the challenges of sustainable development. The aim of the study is to examine how creation of decent employment could be leveraged on through expansion of the economy to help Lagos megacity develop in a sustainable manner. The study adopted qualitative research approach through review of available data, literature and archival resources. The study found that Lagos megacity has a myriad of challenges and there is need for government and administrators to take actions that would improve the employment situation for the benefit and sustainability of its present and future inhabitants. The study therefore concluded that for Lagos to meet the standard of a model megacity, and remain sustainable, it should among other things diversify its economy and create decent employment for its teeming population.

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**Keywords:** Developing Countries, Economic, Lagos, Megacity, Unemployment

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## Introduction

In developing countries, urbanisation is on the increase and will continue to increase. The highest growth will occur in cities of Africa and Asia. Although both continents are more than two third rural, they will be half urban by 2025 (Kotter, 2004). It is noted by Bearak, Moriarty and Ledur (2021) that the number of megacities is on the increase worldwide, from less than four in 1950 to 31 in 2016 with two third of them being in the Asia continent. It is predicted that 10 more cities will join the present 31 megacities to bring the number of megacities to 41 and that Lagos would be the world's most populous city by 2100 with 80 million inhabitants (Bearak, Moriarty & Ledur, 2021).

On their part, Kotkin, Cox, Modarres and Renn (2014) states that the world megacities have grown from three in 1975 (Tokyo, New York and Mexico City) to 29 in 2014 and 31 in 2016. It is projected that the number of megacities will rise to 41 in 2030 with a large number of them located in the developing world of Asia and Africa (Kotkin, Cox, Modarres & Renn, 2014). It is further argued that megacities such as Jarkata, Karachi, Kolkata, Lagos, Manila, and

**Dumebi Anthony  
IDEH**

Department of Industrial  
Relations and Personnel  
Management, Dennis  
Osadebay University,  
Asaba, Nigeria

Mumbai are among the world's top 20 most populous cities that present a great opportunity for large corporate development firms that pledge to fix their problems with ultra expensive hardware.

Kotkin et al. (2014) state that urbanisation brought in its wake, improved incomes, more employment opportunities, and created conditions that made business investments more lucrative. On the other hand, Kotter (2004) opines that the growing number of megacities and rapid process of urbanisation cause a lot of divergent economic, ecological, and social problems and risks. and such cities suffer from high incidence of crime and insecurity. Many of the socio-economic problems especially unemployment in Lagos arose because of the rapid rate of urbanisation that has overstretched its resources. Therefore, the management and sustainability of the megacity became a challenge in the formulation and implementation of urban planning strategies and the management of its development. To experience sustainable development, it is expected that growth should not only be inclusive but also environmentally friendly so as to reduce poverty and create shared prosperity for present and future generations. United Nations General Assembly (1987) view sustainable development as the development that meet the needs of the present population without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Many of the megacities in developing economies lack the economic basis that can sufficiently sustain them to compete beyond their national and regional markets (Kotkin, et al., 2014). Therefore, the rise of megacities in developing world may be a trigger for an emerging urban crisis. This is because inhabitants are crowded into such urban centres that lack economic, social and political infrastructure to improve the lives of the inhabitants. As observed by the author, in Lagos State, as may be the case in other megacities in developing countries, many people work in insecure, informal and precarious jobs as waste disposers, street hawkers, water vendors, labourers, motorcycle and tricycle operators, area boys (touts) and conductors among others. It is therefore imperative for the economy to be diversified and decent jobs created for these

categories of unemployed and underemployed workers. According to World Bank (1998) the unemployed are the economically active population that are available and actively seeking for work but are without work. This includes the individuals that lost their jobs and those that voluntarily left work. Decent jobs are those jobs that ensure job holders are paid wages that will help the workers and their dependants achieve a good standard of living.

The importance of the study of megacities includes the fact that such cities create huge impact on global environment in areas such as land consumption and degradation, air and aquatic pollution, water scarcity, poverty, crime waves and vulnerability. Despite the seriousness of the issues of underemployment and unemployment, the consequences on social well-being of the inhabitants and the sustainability of Lagos megacity, the subject-matter has not received the level of attention it requires in research. The aim of the study therefore, is to examine how Lagos megacity can be developed in a sustainable manner through broadening of its economic base to ensure the creation of decent employment for the large army of unemployed, improve their lives and the lives of other inhabitants. The study focuses on the employment relations dimension of megacity studies and seeks to establish that sustainable development can be achieved in Lagos megacity through broadening of its economic base.

## Theoretical Framework of the Study

The systems theory is adopted for the study. The general system theory was proposed in the 1930s by the Biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy (General Systems Theory, 1968), he emphasised that real systems are open to, and interact with, their environments. The development of systems theory is diverse and it is applied in different areas of study such as computing, ecology, engineering, family psychotherapy, management and social sciences. The systems approach adopts the Input, Process and Output (IPO) strategy in its analysis. Essentially, a system is a combination of things interconnected and interdependent, so as to form a complex whole (Ezeani 2006). Apart from closed systems, every other system interact with, influence and are influenced by the environment

where they operate such as political, social, economic, ethical, legal and technological, among others. Ezeani (2006) further noted that the emphasis on input-output analysis is an important element in the systems approach.

Worthy of note is that a system needs support from environment in order to survive. For example, Lagos State needs and attracts inputs such as payment of taxes, obedience to rules and regulations among others to support its development. Equally significant is the fact that resulting from the outputs, some new inputs are generated and injected into the system through the feedback mechanism to undergo another round of processing and conversion into outputs. It is important for the planners of Lagos megacity should consider environmental factors (political, social, economic, technological, ethical among others) when taking actions or implementing plans. Therefore, to create jobs, solve the problem of unemployment and develop a sustainable Lagos megacity, it is important to take into account the environmental factors. This is because, the solution to sustainable development does not lie solely on a particular segment of the society. It is equally important to state that the business environment influences the decision to employ and develop employees. In the same way, such decisions have effect on the environment.

The parts of a system and the whole system share an inter-working relationship. This implies that when a part of the system is affected in the course of any action, the various other parts will share from the outcome. For example, Ministerial departments and agencies of the Federal Government, the National Assembly, the States and Local Governments as well as the civil society organisations work together towards the goal of making life meaningful for the people by the establishment of social amenities and provision of services such as job creation and employment opportunities. On the other hand, they face the consequences or backlash that may result from lack of basic social amenities and high rate of unemployment. It is for this reason that it becomes imperative for the problems of unemployment to be solved to bring about sustainable development of Lagos. It therefore means that in working towards developing a sustainable Lagos megacity, government should equally diversify

the economy, focus on creation of jobs and generation of decent employment to avoid the ugly consequences such as increased crime rate that might arise due to high unemployment rate.

The systems theory is relevant to this study as it shows that employment generation is a function of the interrelatedness and interdependence of the activities of various sections, segments and activities of the megacity. Different agencies of government will work together with other stakeholders to create decent employment for the inhabitants of Lagos megacity.

## Materials and Methods of Data Collection

This study focused on how Lagos can develop sustainably through diversification of the economy to create employment opportunities for its teeming labour force. The study adopted the qualitative research method with an extensive review of existing literature. The authors relied on secondary source of data collection. The use of secondary source of data collection has become popular in business research, market surveys, facts-findings, model building and among social scientists in general (George, Owoyemi & Onokala, 2012). Secondary data are a description of other researchers' reports (Gravetter & Forzano, 2009). Some of the advantages of secondary data according to Ghauri and Gronhaug (2010) include time and cost saving and accessibility. The data presented were derived from some systematic reviews of the literature such as textbooks, journals, and archival documents from libraries and online databases that include EBSCO Host, Google scholar, JSTOR, Researchgate and other online sources. The reviewed literature includes materials on diversification of economic base, the issue of unemployment, the challenges of megacities and analysis of how broadening of economic base can be a prescription for solving unemployment crisis in Lagos megacity.

The contents and relevance of literature were the major basis for accepting them. The data collected from the reviewed data were subjected to content analysis which is in line with Hart (2018) recommendation for review of literature based on suitable breadth and depth, rigour and



consistency, precision and conciseness, active scrutiny and blend. This conforms to the principle of critical thinking (Akinwale & Ideh, 2022) and what Buechler (2008) described as a process of understanding root causes and asking relevant questions by observing beyond ordinary appearances.

## Discussion

The findings from the review of the literature are presented in the following sections: An evaluation of the nature of megacities, overview of the challenges of Lagos as a megacity, expanding economic base and generation of decent employments.

### An Evaluation of the Nature of Megacities

Kotter (2004) identified the following as the major characteristics of megacities

- **Density:** Megacities have shown high population density, industrial assets and production, social and technical infrastructure. For example, Lagos as a megacity is a centre of economic activities in Nigeria. Megacities play important roles as political and economic centres where decisions are reached on national and international developments. A megacity has available a wide range of highly qualified and skilled labour with high level of investment hence the existence of many industries and port of call for investors.
- **Dynamism:** It is argued that megacities are characterised by high level of dynamism in the areas of spatial and demographic growth as well as formal and informal urban economic sectors which are at the same high level of dynamism.
- **Settlements, Infrastructure and land use:** In the opinion of Kotter (2004), apart from the 'original city' which has the advantage of proper urban planning, other squatters and communities spring up outside the urban planning laws. Many of the illegal settlements are built up by the migrants and lead to serious settlement challenge. It should be noted that in most megacities, there are the issues of infrastructural deficits, lack of proper waste disposal system, inadequate sanitation

facilities and lack of proper water drainage.

- **Socio-economic disparities:** megacities are characterised by different social challenges because of the diverse nature or background of the inhabitants. As noted by Kotter (2004), The most serious explosive change arises from growing socio-economic disparity within the megacities and the lack of social cohesion.
- **Risk and Vulnerability:** When viewed against the backdrop of the high density and the accelerated development, megacities run high risk in the area of man-made and natural disasters. Megacities experience high rate of depletion of natural resources such as land for new settlements, water and energy with resultant effect of strain on the environment. It is noted that in most megacities in developing world, the accepted environmental standards for pollution of the air, water, and soil are exceeded.

### Overview of Challenges of Lagos as a Megacity

As noted by UN (2016), there were 512 cities with at least one million inhabitants globally. It is projected that 662 cities will have at least one million residents. On the other hand, cities with more than 10 million residents which are called megacities were thirty-one (31) globally in 2016 and the projected number for 2030 is forty-one (41) (UN, 2016). Lagos is one of the world's 31 megacities and was ranked number 17 in 2016 and it is projected that by 2030, it will rank number nine among the world's megacities with 24.239 million inhabitants and that by 2100, it would be the world's most populous city with 80 million inhabitants (Bearak, Moriarty & Ledur, 2021).

Lagos like other megacities in developing countries is prone to many challenges. Megacities have different forms of challenges with different social consequences. For example, Ilesanmi (2010) notes that urban planning issues faced by megacities are important because they directly influence the lives of the inhabitants and that other emerging cities will also learn from them. Megacities are faced with challenges that include unemployment, inadequate housing, and shortage of water, air and water pollution, traffic congestions among others. Amire and Ngwama (2015) note that Lagos is characterised by high



unemployment rate due to the fact that about 65 per cent of unemployed school graduates from different States of the Federation migrate to Lagos in search of jobs.

The situation of megacities in developing countries is characterised by an opposing phenomenon of excessive poverty and wealth; severe unemployment and great economic opportunities (Ilesanmi, 2010). The population of megacities are usually divided along two opposing parts of the elite and the poor areas; these could also lead to insecurity and inequality that could bring about threat to social cohesion. Ilesanmi (2010) further states that urban centres in Nigeria are characterised by air and water pollution, overcrowding, poor sanitation, slums, traffic jam, among others. High level of unemployment among the youths gives rise to insecurity and increase in crime rates. The condition of Lagos is not different as noted by Ilesanmi (2010) because since the last decades of the 20th century, Lagos and its residents have experienced acute reduction in their quality of life, high level of poverty, explosion in the number of slums, environmental degradation, dilapidated and congested road system, massive flooding, disrupted sewage network, and increasing crime rates (Emeh, 2012). It is in the same vein that Amire and Ngwama (2015) as well as Emeh (2012) opine that unemployment has created platform for criminal behaviours that are not limited to armed robbery, car snatching, illegal oil bunkering, kidnapping, pipeline vandalism and prostitution among some Nigerian youths.

### **Expanding Economic Base and Generation of Decent Employments**

According to Kotkin, et al., (2014), the basic mission of any city should go beyond the creation of wealthy landlords and big construction companies, make politicians more affluent and powerful, or the elevation of a particular urban design or strategies. The goal of cities should be to enhance the well-being of people. Therefore, if Lagos megacity is to meet the goal of sustainable development and achieve the dream of transforming to a model megacity, the study suggests the creation of decent employment through diversification of the economy.

The solution to growth in the economy and subsequent generation of decent jobs in Lagos megacity are hinged on the ability of the State to diversify its current economic base which is largely dependent on allocation from the Federation Account and taxes. Typical areas of diversification are information and Communications technology (ICT), tourism, agriculture, entertainment, and hospitality. Investments in these areas are veritable ways to improve youth employment. To make this happen, government should invest in and fund these sectors. It has been noted for example, by Chinedum (2006) as cited in Emeh (2012) that inadequate funding and late release of funds from the Federation Account are among the many factors that impaired the effectiveness of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) Agricultural programme. Lagos State Government should therefore partner with NDE and other agencies and funding organisations in their development programmes as a way to improve these sectors and hence create jobs and employment for the inhabitants of the megacity.

Broadening the economic base could be achieved through the following approaches:

#### **i. Government Policies**

There have been various efforts by government in curbing unemployment through creation of policies and institutions that will help diversify the economy. A typical example is the creation of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in 1986 to combat unemployment (Amire & Ngwama, 2015) through promotion of skills acquisition, facilitation of the spirit of creativity, self-reliance and interdependence among Nigerians. The objective of NDE is to fight unemployment by designing and implementing innovative programmes which are directed towards the provision of training opportunities through guidance and management support services to graduates and farmers and small-scale entrepreneur.

There should be a deliberate government policy to reduce the migration pressure on Lagos by improving the infrastructure in rural areas thereby making rural areas more attractive. For example, migration to large cities in India is

slowing down in response to national programme to provide greater unskilled employment in rural areas (Kotkin, et al., 2014). The opening of the rural areas through transport infrastructure will also lead to quicker and less rigorous commuting with benefits in terms of time and energy savings. Therefore, government should explore the option of de-concentration of Lagos population through spreading employment and social amenities away from the urban centres.

## **ii. Infrastructural Development**

Infrastructural development is important for job creation. A good rail network is pivotal for efficient urban mass transport system. It is important that Lagos megacity should have transport systems that comprise high-speed rail lines, metro-lines and light railways. Apart from the above, the water transport system should be improved same way the road transport is being enhanced. This development will not only reduce the number of cars and other vehicles on the roads but will help create employment for the unemployed inhabitants. As noted by Akabueze (2012), Lagos remains the Nation's economic capital due to the vast potentials and investment opportunities at its disposal. Lagos hosts over 40 per cent of the telecom subscribers in Nigeria, the two Seaports, Apapa and Tin-Can, account for 70 per cent of sea trade, Eko and Ikeja electricity distribution companies account for 50 per cent of power transmission and that Muritala Mohammed International Airport accounts for 80 per cent of international air travel in Nigeria (Amire & Ngwama, 2015). Government needs to take advantage of these infrastructures and opportunities to develop its economy

## **iii. Growth of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)**

There is need for government to encourage the development of MSMEs in Lagos megacity as a way to bridge the unemployment gap. Katua (2014) states that MSMEs hold the key to economic growth based on the fast growth of enterprises and the role SMEs play in employment generation. SMEs dominate the world economy in terms of employment. For example, Katua (2014) notes that between 55 per cent and 80 per cent of total employment in Western Europe, Japan, and

United States of America (USA) is accounted for by SMEs. It is observed also that, the approximately 23 million SMEs in USA employ more than 50 per cent of the private sector workforce. In USA, entrepreneurs are respected because of their role in creation of new jobs through innovation and technological advancement (Muragia, 2008). If 97 per cent of all businesses in Nigeria are SMEs and they contribute 50 per cent of Nigeria employment (Agwu & Emeti, 2014), it then means that the sector requires paying attention. In view of the importance of SMEs to employment generation and economic growth, the Government of Lagos State should take advantage of the importance of SME as a vehicle for generating employment and work towards developing the sector through infrastructural development, building of skill acquisition centres, financing, and creating enabling environment conducive for competition and business growth. Government should encourage and equip young entrepreneurs with necessary skills needed for proper development of the business.

## **iv. Improved Educational System**

It is noted by Adebisi and Oni (2012) that lack of entrepreneurial skills is one of the major contributing factors to the problem of unemployment among school graduates and youths in Nigeria. In other words, a major factor responsible for the high rate of unemployment among Nigerian graduates is the exclusion of entrepreneurship education in the curricula of most tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Adeola and Bolarinwa (2010) see entrepreneurship education as a collection of formalised teaching that trains and educates those interested in business creation or small business development. Entrepreneurship education also provides individuals with knowledge and skills to identify business opportunities and give them the courage to act on them. It is the entrepreneurship education that makes it possible for individuals to set up their own businesses, hence reduces their dependence on the government for job creation. The value orientation that every educated person must secure a paid employment either in the private or public sector is a demonstration of our lack of entrepreneurial education.

It is also worth noting that apart from the challenge of entrepreneurship education, it does appear that Nigerian institutions' curricula and pedagogical arrangements are non in line with current realities, hence cannot meet the standards of the needed skill sets in today's workplaces. Various authors (Obanya 2004, Odia and Omofonmwan 2007) have argued that most of the graduates turned out from our academic institutions may not be employable due to the falling and compromised academic standards, and infrastructural decay in our educational institutions. It is on this note that Onuma (2016) recommends that university syllabi should be distilled to accommodate newest technologies and business practice to enable students grasp business principles and enhance functional knowledge and job creation ability. To achieve this, government should engage in rebuilding the educational system by improving the infrastructural needs for teaching, research and development. Equally, the educational institutions should be encouraged to introduce technical, vocational, and entrepreneurship education at all levels. More so, the curricula should be developed in collaboration with the end users such that the required or needed skill sets are incorporated in the school curriculum.

#### **v. Development of Rural Areas**

In 2011, according to Oteri and Ayeni (nd) the classification of Lagos megacity into urban, semi urban and rural areas shows that 32.5 per cent of the communities were urban. The statistics would have changed significantly due to rapid expansion and speedy development of Lagos megacity. Although the focus of this study is on Lagos megacity, but the development of the area described by Oteri and Ayeni (nd) as megacity region is imperative for sustainability of Lagos megacity. Lagos megacity region includes the entire Lagos State and the four adjoining Local Government Areas of Ogun State (Oteri & Ayeni, (nd). Development of the rural areas will bring about employment opportunities in such areas and that will reduce the pressure on Lagos megacity.

### **Conclusion**

The study examined how diversification of the economy could be a prescription for sustainable

development of Lagos megacity. The study found that: Lagos megacity has a myriad of challenges and there is need for government and administrators to begin to plan how to make Lagos a model megacity that will be beneficial to and sustainable for all its present and future inhabitants. There is need for government to take actions and create policies that will expand the economic base of the State, enhance employment creation and reduce the high level of unemployment in the metropolis; that Employment could be generated by stakeholders' interventions in infrastructural development, improved educational system, development of MSMEs and the rural areas of the State.

The study concludes that, for Lagos and other megacities in developing countries to meet the standard of a modern megacity, and remain sustainable, their economic base should be expanded to create decent employment for its population especially the vulnerable groups.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the conclusion of the study, the following are recommended:

- i. The government and the relevant stakeholders should create policies that will generate decent employment for the large army of unemployed.
- ii. Action should be taken to transform the educational system to be able to produce graduates with technical, vocational and entrepreneurial skills.
- iii. Create infrastructure that could enhance the development of MSMEs.
- iv. That Government should strive to develop the local/surrounding communities to reduce the pressure on the central Lagos megacity.

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