

# Communal Facilities and Residential Neighbourhoods in Akure, Nigeria

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## Abstract

Availability of communal facilities within the neighbourhoods helps to meet various social needs. At the same time satisfies current needs of the local communities without exerting strain on the existing facilities to the detriment of future demand. The focus of this paper is on communal facilities in selected residential estates in Akure, the capital city of Ondo state, Nigeria. Using the primary and secondary sources of data collection, the paper takes a critical look at the importance of communal facilities in neighbourhoods and examines the adequacy of communal facilities in residential areas in Nigeria. Two residential estates in Akure namely: Alagbaka and Ijapo estates were studied through the use of questionnaire and direct observations, to elicit relevant data relating to social, economic and environmental variables. Data obtained were collated and findings from empirical survey presented in the single factor descriptive analysis. Findings from the study affirm that the communal facilities available within the study area were inadequate. The paper recommends public enlightenment, environmental education, upgrading of existing facilities to acceptable standard.

**Keywords:** Communal Facilities, Neighbourhood, Residential Estates, Housing

## 1. Introduction

Urban life with its concentration of people encompasses diverse activities which call for essential components and resources required to meet the daily needs in order to satisfy the day living and wellbeing. As such call for facilities which satisfy these needs within the communal areas. However, the provisions of these facilities are in most cases either very minimal, overstretched or absent in most residential neighbourhoods in Nigeria. As argued by Olotuah and Adesiji (2005); Akinbamijo and Fasakin (2006), these are due to increased demand for urban services as a result of increasing population, unsustainable use of resources, income inadequacies, inefficient and non-existing strategies (Essien, Elizabeth and Akintoye, 2012).

Consequently, Essien, Elizabeth and Akintoye (2012) argued that, the absence of the basic necessities of man, such as good roads, water, medical services and a conducive living environment has called for Nigeria being classified among poor countries of the world; which has emanated from the fallout of inadequate urban infrastructure, poor planning and management. Arguing in the same vein, Owoeye (2012) emphasised that the decay of the environment in many developing countries is due to neglect, lack of integrated planning and decay of urban infrastructure. In addition, Akinbamijo (2006) affirmed that the failure of basic environmental resources or facilities which otherwise should be an added advantage of healthy urban existence have posed as dangers to the environment and human life. Furthermore, many of the facilities are usually for general use and are not connected directly to individual residents but are utilised by residents in order to satisfy the individual needs of communication, recreation, religion, safety and security, and education.

Communal facilities (CFs) differ from one community to the other depending on the size and what is needed within certain residential neighbourhood. Some of these as averred by Cardiff Supplementary Planning Guidance (2007); Robinowitz (2012) and Emmanuel and Akinbode (2012) include educational facilities, community gardens, religious entities, hospitals, museum, nursing homes, libraries; and serves as means by which local residents are empowered (Emmanuel and Akinbode, 2012). Defining neighbourhood, Mallo and Anigbogu (2009) refers to it as residential area in a particular location of a city. As such CFs are needed in residential neighbourhoods and jointly utilised by residents within the neighbourhood.

Confirming the state of the Nigerian urban centres, Olotuah and Bobadoye (2009), noted that about seventy five percent of urban dwellers live in slums and in degrading human conditions. These is because the Nigerian city dwellers are very much attached to their 'primitive' origins (Uduku, 1994), furthermore are 'disorganised and disinterested in urban development' and so are not appreciative of the need for organised urban social services. As affirmed by Adegun (2011), housing embraces all the social services and utilities that go to make a neighbourhood a liveable environment, however, the adequate provision is still a mirage in most African countries with no exception to Nigeria. The main objective of this paper therefore is to assess the residential neighbourhood in Akure in terms of availability and adequacy of relevant CFs using selected residential estates as case studies.

## **2. Importance of Communal Facilities in Residential Neighbourhood**

The importance of CFs within the residential neighbourhood cannot be overemphasised. Apart from meeting several needs, it helps to reduce the need to travel for residents within such neighbourhoods where they exist. As such there is need for CFs to be an integral part of developments.

As argued by Montgomery (2005), on a daily basis, people need places to meet as well as things to do when not at work, as such CFs provide the opportunity for inter relationship as well as bonding between residents of the same community.

Cardiff Supplementary Planning Guidance (2007) defines CFs as 'facilities used by local communities for leisure and social purposes' and include meeting places, halls, community centres, play and leisure centres. And these as averred by Emmanuel and Akinbode (2012) could also be referred to as infrastructural facilities. Montgomery (2005) asserts that 'individual places have their own distinct sense of place' as such, the activities which take place in such places give its identity. Furthermore, many cities, towns, suburbs and local neighbours owe their success to sharing common set of characteristics of CFs which includes local shops, cafes, post offices, banks, sports hall, theatre, etc. In order words, the presence of CFs gives and reveals the identity and success of such places.

Also, Dines, Cattell, Gesler and Curtis (2006) argues that the presence of CFs helps people to be attached to their locality as well as presents the opportunities of meeting with other people. And these play vital roles in enhancing the lives of residents (Rabinowitz, 2012); as many of these facilities play varied roles in neighbourhoods. For instance, whilst the libraries and museum open doors to knowledge, ideas and culture; the health of residents are safe guarded by medical facilities. Furthermore, the transportation facilities offer mobility and access in a more convenient way to residents; in addition, the green parks provide green spaces. Combining all these together, help in enhancing the quality of life of the people 'socially, intellectually, culturally, economically, politically and psychologically' (Rabinowitz, 2012)

Highlighting the importance and roles CFs play, Montgomery (2005); Dines, Cattell, Gesler and Curtis (2006) and Rabinowitz (2012); noted that these facilities help improve the general quality of life in the community by providing outdoor life for residents. They also provide an avenue for physical, intellectual and cultural activities through sports, music and provide chances for experiences. Furthermore, CFs instils a sense of community pride and an opportunity for residents to pay attention to the maintenance of the community. Again, it provides services for all, especially in the area of commuting, as well as preventing crime through active participation of residents.

Also, CFs help increase the level of fairness and equity in the community by providing access to facilities that make life better. Consequently, new residents, business and tourism are attracted as a result of good communal facilities and improved living conditions. In the same vein, Vizec (2010) posits that 'CFs play the role of creating healthy communities, enhancing wellbeing, building social networks and providing a resource for training, employment and personal development'. In addition, CFs should not only be available but adequate.

### **3. Adequacy of Communal Facilities in Residential Areas in Nigeria**

Housing as acknowledged by Jiboye (2010a) is one of the most essential necessities of human life and is a major economic asset in every nation. Defining this term, Akogun (2011) stated that it encompasses the shelter and facilities that make up the living environment to make life meaningful and comfortable for people. Furthermore, the quality of the living environment which can also be referred to as the residential area mirrors the city development as well as shows the quality of life of the inhabitants (Coker et al, 2007).

Many developing countries as noted by Dung-Gwom, (2007); Ooi and Phua (2007); Rojas (2000); Jiboye (2010c) are characterised by poor social and residential environment and lack adequate housing and basic liveable environment in neighbourhoods. This has resulted in slums and squalors due to rapid population. Noting this set back in Nigeria, Jiboye (2010b) further attributes it to the negligible use of inputs from human values in housing design and development as a contributing factor to the poor environmental state. Also, Uduku (1994) averred that many urban areas are characterised by inadequacies in the provision of social infrastructure. Affirming this, Emmanuel and Akinbode (2012) stated that the provision of infrastructural facilities is vital to the development of any community. Furthermore, residential environment play a vital role in socio-economic and psychological development of individuals, states and nations (Akogun, 2011); as such, provision of facilities that would enhance the living condition of residents within a neighbourhood is very essential.

As noted by Arigbola (2011), more people prefer settling in the cities, however, these has not been adequately managed and governed to give an improved quality of life and living standards; consequently, has resulted in the decay of the environment due to neglect, lack of integrated planning and decay of urban infrastructure (Owoeye, 2012). Thus has threatened the qualities of the urban environment (Fadamiro and Atolagbe, 2004). Good governance as emphasised by Tofomo (2008) is indispensable in achieving sustainable development especially in contemporary times and particularly in developing countries of which Nigeria is a part.

### **4. Communal Facilities and Housing Quality**

Housing quality is affected by a number of factors principal amongst which is the provision and performance of vital communal facilities as cited by Onokerhorave in Olotuah (2002). He noted that the adequacy of basic urban services is an important instrument, which influences the quality and cost of housing and it is paramount in the overall development (physical and socio-economic) of the environment. Furthermore, the demand for urban services in the less developed countries has grown over the years due to their rapid rate of urbanization. Ajanlekoko (2001) supported this by stating that rapid urbanization contributes to low infrastructural services. Montgomery (1988) opined that the lack of political will on the side of governments is the main reason for their failure to provide adequate urban services.

The provision of urban services is essential for healthy living (Olotuah, 2002). Kalbermatten (1982) stressed that a dependable supply of safe drinking water and hygienic disposal of human wastes are important ingredients for a healthy and productive life. Similarly, World Health Organization (1971) noted that water intended for man's consumption must be free from organisms and concentrations of chemical substances that may be dangerous to health. Living standard is not only determined by income and consumption, but non-economic aspects such as life expectancy, mortality, access to clean drinking water, education, health, sanitation, electricity and security are also important measures of well being (Saidatulakmal and Riaz, 2012). Thus, the state and availability of communal facilities in any residential neighbourhood usually affect its quality of housing.

### **5. Study Area**

Akure is a medium-sized traditional Nigerian city and it existed long before the advent of British colonial rule in Nigeria. The city is situated in the South-Western part of Nigeria, lies approximately on latitude 7° 15' North of the Equator and longitude 5° 05' East of the Greenwich Meridian and became the provincial headquarters of Ondo province in 1939, and the capital city of Ondo State and Akure Local Government Council Headquarters in 1979 (Ayeni and Ebohon, 2012; Ayeni, 2012; Akinbamijo, 2006; Olujimi and Bello, 2009). Consequently, there was heterogeneous massing of people and activities in the city.

### **6. Methodology**

The study utilized a structured questionnaire to collect the necessary data. This was administered in the two state government-owned residential estates within Akure metropolis namely Alagbaka estate (E $\alpha$ ) and Ijapo estate (E $\beta$ ) which form the study area. The instrument used for the research was administered by 500-level students of the

Department of Architecture at the Federal University of Technology, Akure who acted as research assistants after having been thoroughly trained for the survey.

Provided in the questionnaire are social, economic and environmental variables the respondents could use to indicate their preferences. These include their level of education, income level, disposition about CFs, etc. For the purpose of this study, Alagbaka estate was coded as 'E $\alpha$ ' and Ijapo estate as 'E $\beta$ '. Sampling frame of 60 questionnaires was administered in Alagbaka estate while 30 were administered at Ijapo estate, which required simple random sampling in choosing the cases. The questions were tested to avoid ambiguities. Since the variables under investigation generally address the situation of CFs in the respective estates, their responses were expected to be similar, provided that the respondents are rational. All the questionnaires (100%) were retrieved and the data obtained from them were collated and presented in the single factor descriptive analysis, hence comparing the responses from both estates.

## 6. Findings and Discussion

In table 1, it is observed that only 3.3% of the respondents from E $\alpha$  were illiterate and none was illiterate from E $\beta$  and majority of the respondents in the study area had either Bachelor of Science (B. Sc.) or Higher National Diploma (HND) as their highest qualification. Therefore, it could be deduced that majority of the residents are enlightened. From the same table, it is also observed that majority (71.7%) of the respondents in E $\alpha$  earn between N10,001 – N29,999 while 36.7% in E $\beta$  earn same. Likewise, in E $\beta$ , 40% of the respondents earned N10,000 or less. At E $\alpha$ , 91.7% of the respondents understood the importance of having communal facilities in residential neighbourhoods as being for convenience.

From table 2, it can be observed that in 61.7% of the respondents at E $\alpha$  believed that the provision of health facilities is their top priority; their second and third priorities were believed to be a filling station and shopping mall respectively. On the other hand, in E $\beta$  30% of the respondents believed that the provision of a cyber café is their top priority, followed by recreational facilities (26.7%), while their other priorities were a health facility and shopping mall.

Table 3 shows the residents' perception on the availability of CFs in their respective neighbourhoods. In E $\alpha$  50% of the residents believed that communal waste bins were very inadequate and 35% believed that they were not available at all; while in E $\beta$ , all the residents believed that communal waste bins are very available in their neighbourhoods. In E $\alpha$ , 58.3% of the residents believed that public water supply was not made available to them; likewise, in E $\beta$ , 63.3% of the residents were of the same opinion. In E $\alpha$ , 58.3% of the respondents were of the opinion that recreational facilities were not available; while in E $\beta$ , 70% of the respondents believed that they were very inadequate. In E $\alpha$ , 93.3% of the respondents believed health facilities were very inadequate; while 63.3% in E $\beta$  were of the same opinion. This is in line with their priorities in table 2 above. In E $\alpha$ , 38.3% of the respondents were of the opinion that markets/shops were fairly adequate in their neighbourhood; while 66.7% of the respondents in E $\beta$  believed that they were very inadequate in their neighbourhood.

Table 4 shows the perception of residents on the state of the CFs in their neighbourhood. Being very concerned indicates that the state of that aspect is very bad; concerned indicated that such aspect is fair; while not concerned indicates that it is in a very good state. From the table, it is observed that all of the respondents in E $\alpha$  were very concerned about the cleanliness of the neighbourhood; while 86.7% in E $\beta$  were not concerned. In E $\alpha$ , all the respondents were very concerned about the state of the drainages; while 76.7% in E $\beta$  were not concerned about it. In E $\alpha$  all the respondents were very concerned about the state of the roads; while in E $\beta$  50% were not concerned. In E $\alpha$ , the perception of the respondents were split with 50% being very concerned and 50% not concerned about the general condition of the houses; while in E $\beta$ , 83.3% were not concerned about it. This shows that generally the condition of the communal facilities in E $\beta$  is better than those in E $\alpha$ .

Table 5 shows the perception of the residents on the benefits of CFs. From the table, it is observed that 50% of the respondents at E $\alpha$  strongly disagree that the available CFs have enhanced their attachment to their neighbourhoods, the same as those that disagree; however, 40% of the residents at E $\beta$  agree that the available CFs has enhanced their

attachment to their neighbourhoods. In E $\alpha$ , 50% of the respondents disagreed that adequate CFs will improve the quality of their lives; while, in E $\beta$ , 36.7% were of the opinion that adequate CFs will improve the quality of their lives. In E $\alpha$ , all the respondents believed that CFs are very essential in residential neighbourhoods; while 66.7% in E $\beta$  were of the same opinion. In E $\alpha$ , 51.7% of the respondents believed that CFs enhance bonding between residents; while 43.3% were of the same opinion in E $\beta$ . In E $\alpha$ , 50% disagree that the available CFs are regularly maintained; while 33.3% in E $\beta$  agreed to the statement.

## 7. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has shown the importance of having CFs in residential neighbourhoods. It has also revealed that a paucity of CFs can have an adverse effect on the residents of the neighbourhood. In the two housing estates studied, it was observed that there is inadequate CFs; although the study observed that in terms of availability and adequacy of CFs, E $\beta$  has a slight advantage over that of E $\alpha$ . The residents also expressed deep concern over the state of the few available CFs especially due to lack of regular maintenance. There is thus a dire need for government intervention into this issue to salvage the situation in order to give the residents conducive environment to live in since the estates are state government owned. Also, as a matter of policy, new estates should be adequately provided with CFs, especially urban services such as electricity, pipe-borne water, etc, before they are opened for habitation; this is usually not the case in several Nigerian cities and thus, should be integrated into law and implemented faithfully. Furthermore, development control within residential estates should be sufficiently enforced without compromising the master plan in order to prevent land misuse.

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Table 1: Responses from residents of the study area

	E $\alpha$	E $\beta$
1. Educational background		
Not literate	3.3	-
SSCE	13.3	26.7
ND	5	13.3
B. Sc./ HND	58.3	46.7
M. Sc.	20	13.3
2. Income level per month		
N10,000 or less	3.3	40
N10,001 – N29,999	71.7	36.7
N30,000 and above	25	23.3
3. Importance of CFs in residential neighbourhoods		
Economic development	3.3	10
Convenience	91.7	3.3
Security and Safety	-	3.3
Beauty of the urban environment	5	3.3
4. Factors influencing adequacy of CFs		
Government not committed to residents welfare	41.7	60
The residents do not cooperate with government	-	-
Improper layout planning	58.3	16.7
Building on CFs spaces	-	23.3

Source: Researchers' field survey (2012)

Table 2: Responses from residents of the study area on priority of CFs

	E $\alpha$			E $\beta$		
	1st	2nd	3rd	1st	2nd	3rd
Health Facilities	61.7	5	10	3.3	16.7	6.7
Games Centre	3.3	3.3	3.3			
Filling Station	11.7	18.3	20			
Shopping Mall	5	6.7	13.3	6.7	16.7	3.3
Waste bins	3.3	6.7	1.7			
Crèche	5	10	11.7			
Events Centre	-	10	6.7			
Cyber Café				30	3.3	6.7
Recreational facilities				26.7	6.7	10
Public toilets				10	3.3	3.3
Educational facilities				10	-	-

Source: Researchers' field survey (2012)

Table 3: Respondents' perception on availability of CFs in study area

	E $\alpha$				E $\beta$			
	VI	FA	VA	NA	VI	FA	VA	NA
Communal Waste bins	50	15	-	35	-	-	100	-
Public Toilets	-	-	-	100	33.3	-	-	66.7
Parking	16.7	-	-	83.3	60	16.7	3.3	16.7
Public Water Supply	35	6.7	-	58.3	36.7	-	-	63.3
Recreational facilities	26.7	15	-	58.3	70	3.3	26.7	-
Religious Centres	36.7	60	-	3.3	63.3	26.7	10	-
Educational Facilities	48.3	51.7	-	-	66.7	8.3	-	6.7
Health Facilities	93.3	6.7	-	-	63.3	20	1.7	3.3
Market/ Shops	21.7	38.3	-	36.7	66.7	23.3	1.7	1.7
Communal Gardens	6.7	46.7	-	46.7	60	10	-	26.7
Leisure Facilities	50	45	-	5	46.7	-	-	33.3
Games Centres	53.3	-	-	46.7	20	-	-	76.7
Cyber Cafes	50	-	-	50	43.3	40	13.3	-
Community Centres	48.3	51.7	-	-	66.7	16.7	-	13.3

Legend: VI: Very Inadequate; FA: Fairly Adequate; VA: Very Adequate; NA: Not Available

Source: Researchers' field survey (2012)

Table 4: Perception of respondents on the state of the CFs in the study area

	E $\alpha$			E $\beta$		
	VC	C	NC	VC	C	NC
Cleanliness	100	-	-	3.3	-	86.7
Drainages	100	-	-	-	13.3	76.7
Road Condition	100	-	-	13.3	26.7	50
Electricity Supply	100	-	-	93.3	-	-
General condition of houses	50	-	50	-	6.7	83.3
Waste Management	100	-	-	13.3	10	70
Public water supply	-	100	-	93.3	-	-
Maintenance of CFs	50	-	50	93.3	-	-

Legend: VC: Very Concerned; C: Concerned; NC: Not Concerned

Source: Researchers' field survey (2012)

Table 5: Residents' perception of benefits of CFs

	E $\alpha$					E $\beta$				
	SD	D	NAD	A	SA	SD	D	NAD	A	SA
The available CFs has enhances my attachment to my neighbourhood	50	50	-	-	-	3.3	6.7	16.7	40	23.3
I believe adequate CFs will improve the quality of my life	-	50	50	-	-	-	10	20	36.7	23.3
CFs are absolutely essential in residential neighbourhoods	-	-	-	100	-	-	-	-	66.7	33.3
CFs enhances bonding between residents of neighbourhoods	-	-	48.3	51.7	-	-	-	6.7	43.3	26.7
The presence of communal facilities gives an identity to a residential neighbourhood	-	65	35	-	-	-	3.3	53.3	16.7	16.7
Communal gardens are not necessary in residential neighbourhoods	50	-	48.3	1.7	-	26.7	33.3	20	6.7	3.3
The maintenance of the available facilities is done regularly	46.7	50	3.3	-	-	6.7	16.7	13.3	33.3	6.7
I have several options for relaxation within my neighbourhood	-	-	98.3	1.7	-	36.7	20	13.3	13.3	-
Within my neighbourhood I can buy almost anything I need for domestic use	-	-	100	-	-	25	26.7	3.3	-	6.7

Legend: SD: Strongly Disagree; D: Disagree; NAD: Neither Agree nor Disagree; A: Agree; SA: Strongly Agree

Source: Researchers' field survey (2012)

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