

# Understanding the Complexity of Factors Which Influence Livelihoods of the Urban Poor in Lagos' Informal Settlements 2015

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## Abstract

In recent times, there has been a renewed effort to improve the living conditions and alleviate poverty of informal settlements dwellers in Lagos through land regularisation which is expected to grant formal title to every land owner within informal settlements and uncommitted government land. However, this study argues that the urban poor in Lagos are faced with various vulnerabilities and deprivations, which go beyond issues of titling and tenure insecurity. Therefore, understanding these various dimensions of vulnerabilities and deprivations are important to evolving a holistic and sustainable strategic framework for poverty reduction in Lagos. This argument is in line with the current global thinking that policy framework for poverty alleviation can no longer ignore inclusive strategy, which simultaneously takes into consideration poverty in all its dimensions as well as aspirations and needs of the poor. Against this background, through the lens of sustainable livelihood framework, based on four informal settlements across Lagos, the study examines the issues of livelihoods in informal settlements. The study explores the interplay between location, tenure, policies and livelihoods. In particular, the study focuses on how these factors interplay with livelihood vulnerability and access to assets, and the implications for sustainable livelihoods and poverty alleviation strategies.

Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) provides a framework which integrates various dimensions of poverty. This framework enables a broad range of quantitative and qualitative research design and data collection methods. For the purpose of this research, both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, which included household survey, households' in-depth interview, key informants' interviews, direct observation and published documents were used. A total of 400 questionnaires were randomly administered to households' heads across the four case settlements.

In addition, a total of 40 interviews were conducted. The use of multiple methods provided valuable information on livelihoods assets and vulnerabilities of the urban poor in Lagos.

The study reveals that the urban poor have inadequate access to both public and private livelihoods assets. The inadequacy is manifested in both the quantity (generally limited) and quality (generally poor) of livelihoods assets. The study further reveals that, apart from the generic vulnerabilities, urban poor in different locations across Lagos face context (location) specific vulnerabilities, which are, often, either not understood by policymakers or they are deliberately overlooked, as not important, when developing poverty alleviation strategies. There is a disconnection between poverty reduction policies, and the realities, aspirations and needs of the poor. Institutions, including government, policymakers and even urban planners, through various economic, environmental and urban development policies, work against the ingenuity of the urban poor, thereby undermining their efforts to building a sustainable livelihoods and moving out of poverty. This study, therefore, suggests that poverty alleviation should be based on a policy framework that, guarantees inclusive provision of livelihood assets, reduces vulnerability and enables institutions.