

Addressing homelessness: Lessons and responses from Lagos Metropolis, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study explores the complex and multifaceted issue of homelessness in Lagos Metropolis, Nigeria, focusing on institutional and individual responses to the phenomenon. The objective is to provide evidence-based insights that can inform effective policy interventions. A mixed-method approach was adopted, incorporating a reconnaissance survey, participant observation, in-depth interviews, questionnaire administration, and secondary data. Data were obtained from both the homeless people and government sources. Government perspectives were gathered through secondary data, while homeless people were selected using convenience sampling from major markets, transport terminals and beaches across selected Local Government Areas. 239 homeless people were identified, of which 188 were successfully contacted and sampled. Descriptive statistics were used in analysing the data. Findings revealed that Nigerian governments have implemented various national housing policies and programs targeting homelessness, often framed within broader poverty alleviation strategies. However, these efforts are frequently inadequate or poorly tailored to the unique needs of the homeless population. The study further indicates that the majority of homeless individuals desire targeted support from the government, including employment opportunities (51.6%), affordable housing in accessible locations (40.4%), and essential support services such as mental health care and addiction treatment (8.0%). The study concludes that homelessness in Lagos is not merely a housing deficit but a manifestation of more profound structural inequalities and social injustices. It calls for holistic, person-centred responses that integrate housing, social support, and economic empowerment into inclusive urban development planning.

Keywords: Homelessness, Lagos Metropolis, Nigeria, Responses, Lessons.

Introduction

Over the years, homelessness has emerged as one of the most visible indications of poverty and broadening inequality in many cities across the globe. It is regarded as one of the most severe forms of housing and social exclusion. Though it is a global phenomenon, its definition varies worldwide; its description is restricted to the status of social, political, economic, and technological innovation in different countries and places. Homelessness is defined as a situation where an individual or family is without shelter and thus belongs to a part of a particular disadvantaged group of the population (1). It can also be described as a state where people are roofless (sleeping rough), houseless (living in institutions) and inadequately housed (2). In addition, the phenomenon describes a situation where an individual, group of individuals or family resort to living under the bridge, in abandoned or

dilapidated buildings, public places, motor parks, and other make-shift apartments not owned by them and not originally designed and fit for human habitation (3). Thus, from these definitions, it can be established that homelessness transcends housing deficit. It is often a social problem, whose definition is occasioned by the social, political, and economic structure of a city or that of a nation. In recent years, the incidence of homelessness has triggered various responses from different sides. These are responses of the homeless towards homelessness, the government, and the people to homelessness and the homeless. As far back as 2007, various governments' responses have emerged chiefly from the developed nations in the form of policy frameworks to tackle the menace of homelessness (4-8). The responses from the government include providing immediate shelter to remove individuals from the situation and

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enlisting them for housing schemes to solve the situation permanently. In the case of the homeless, the response is to engage in various kinds of occupations which can generate income for livelihood and housing. In light of these, the concern of this study is to examine the prevalence of homelessness in Lagos Metropolis, examine past policies initiated, aggregate responses to homelessness, and also suggest intervention approaches to eradicate homelessness.

Global Statistics on Homelessness

Homelessness is a widespread issue. Globally, homeless people are estimated to be between 100 million and one billion, depending on how homelessness is defined (9-11). It is a social problem that has, over the years, drawn global attention. A reflection of the current situation of this social phenomenon across selected nations of the world is discussed below.

Homelessness in India, Brazil and Indonesia

Homelessness is a pressing challenge across many countries of the Global South, particularly India, Brazil, and Indonesia, where rapid urbanisation, socio-economic inequality, and environmental risks converge. In India, about 1.8 million people are homeless, and 73 million families lack adequate housing. Forced evictions, such as the demolition of 53,700 homes in 2017 that displaced 260,000 people, and large-scale displacements from disasters and conflict, resulting in 2.9 million people being displaced in 2018, also exacerbated the crisis (12-14).

Brazil faces similar challenges, with more than 50 million people living in inadequate housing and over 100,000 homeless. High unemployment (12.8%) and widespread poverty affecting 4.2% of the population remain key drivers of housing insecurity (15-17). In Indonesia, homelessness is shaped by vulnerability to natural disasters, climate change, and rapid urbanisation. An estimated 3 million people are homeless, while 25 million families live in precarious settlements along slums, railway tracks, and riverbanks (18). In 2019 alone, 857,500 people were displaced due to disasters and violence (18).

Taken together, the experiences of India, Brazil, and Indonesia reveal how structural poverty, weak housing policies, and exposure to economic and environmental shocks sustain high levels of homelessness. These cases highlight the intersection of social inequality and urban

vulnerability in shaping housing insecurity in the Global South.

Lessons from the Global South

Homelessness is a systemic problem that cuts across several sectors, institutions and agencies (19). Hence, it is an issue that requires an integrated response regarding governance, policies and programs. In recent decades, the issue of homelessness has triggered various responses, chiefly from developed nations (6, 7, 20). These responses have been largely effective and have also reduced homelessness to a great extent. A detailed explanation of the different responses adopted in developed nations is discussed below.

Housing First Model: This model is widely recognised and it is one of the effective approaches to addressing homelessness. This model prioritises providing homeless persons and families with permanent and affordable housing as quickly as possible, as well as the supportive services needed to ensure long-term stability and prevent recurring homelessness (21). Housing first has been widely adopted in various developed nations, particularly in the United States, Canada, Denmark, France and the United Kingdom, where it is integrated into broader national homelessness strategies. The widespread adoption of this model can be attributed to its alignment with a housing-led approach to addressing homelessness, which prioritises the swift provision of permanent housing as a means to end homelessness and improve the quality of life. This approach is grounded in the robust evidence that, with appropriate support and adequate resources, all homeless persons can attain stability in permanent housing.

Empirical research has consistently reported the success of the housing first model in improving housing retention rates, reducing reliance on crisis services and institutions, and improving individuals' health outcomes (22, 23). Unlike traditional models that require individuals to address underlying issues such as substance abuse or mental health problems before being provided with housing, housing first model removes these preconditions, focusing on the immediate provision of stable housing as the first crucial step in the recovery process. Central to the housing first approach is the claim that housing is a fundamental human right. It centred approach ensures that individuals are not simply housed but also

provided with appropriate resources to maintain their housing and improve their overall quality of life. In essence, the housing first model offers a transformative approach to homelessness by recognising housing as the essential foundation for recovery and well-being. Its emphasis on permanent, stable housing, combined with individualised and person-centred support services, has proven to yield positive outcomes in the fight against homelessness, not only in terms of housing retention but also in improving health and social outcomes for individuals and families. As such, it represents a critical strategy in the ongoing effort to address homelessness globally and ensure that all individuals have access to the stability and dignity of a home.

Rapid Re-Housing: Rapid re-housing (RRH) is an increasingly utilised model to address homelessness by providing homeless individuals and families with immediate, time-limited rental assistance and support services aimed at securing stable housing (24). RRH is particularly suitable for households facing moderate barriers to housing stability, where the aim is to swiftly move homeless individuals out of homelessness and into permanent housing. The core objective of RRH is to reduce the duration of homelessness by ensuring that individuals or families are quickly housed, even before they have resolved all of the underlying issues that may have contributed to them being homeless. This model contrasts with other approaches that may require individuals to stabilise or address challenges such as substance abuse, mental health, or employment before receiving housing. Instead, RRH focuses on the notion that providing stable housing is a critical first step, after which individuals can begin addressing other aspects of their lives with greater stability and support.

Among the defining features of the RRH, it typically offers a short-term, time-limited rental subsidy, lasting for a period of six months, which may be extended depending on the specific household needs and their ability to achieve housing stability (25). The RRH model focuses on speed and efficiency in housing placement. By prioritising rapid access to housing, the model reduces the trauma and instability associated with prolonged homelessness. Studies have emphasised that rapid housing placement, coupled with appropriate support services, leads to higher rates of housing

retention compared to models that delay housing placement in favour of addressing other issues first (24). RRH helps mitigate the adverse health, social, and psychological consequences of extended homelessness. Rapid Re-Housing is often targeted at those with moderate needs for support. These are individuals and families who may be at risk of becoming homeless but are not experiencing the severe challenges that often characterise long-term homelessness, such as chronic substance abuse or mental health issues. This differentiation allows resources to be directed more efficiently towards those who are most likely to benefit from short-term assistance and move towards long-term stability.

In summary, rapid re-housing represents a pragmatic and effective strategy for addressing homelessness, particularly for those who face temporary housing instability. By quickly transitioning individuals and families into permanent housing and providing essential support services.

Permanent Supportive Housing: Permanent supportive housing (PSH) is a targeted intervention designed to address the needs of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness, particularly those who are dealing with disabilities, substance abuse and mental health challenges. Furthermore, this approach combines the provision of long-term, stable housing with support services aimed at fostering independence and improving the quality of life (26-27). Furthermore, studies have revealed that a distinctive feature of PSH is that the duration of residency is not limited. Additionally, individuals are not required to meet any specific conditions to remain housed. This approach recognises that for many individuals experiencing chronic homelessness, stability in housing is the first step towards improving their quality of life.

The success of PSH in reducing chronic homelessness has been widely documented, particularly in developed countries, where the model has been integrated into broader homelessness prevention and intervention strategies. In cities across the United States, Canada, and Europe, PSH programs have demonstrated significant improvements in housing retention, reductions in emergency service utilisation, and better health outcomes for participants (28). The key to these outcomes is the

model's focus on addressing the unique and complex needs of each individual, while offering them the stability of a permanent home. As a result, PSH is increasingly viewed as a best practice in the fight against chronic homelessness, particularly for individuals who have experienced homelessness for extended periods of time and who face significant barriers to housing stability.

In contrast, responses to homelessness in many developing countries, including Nigeria, remain largely driven by humanitarian efforts led by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), faith-based organisations, and welfare groups. These efforts, while valuable, often lack the coordinated policy response seen in more developed nations. In many cases, the federal governments of developing nations have been slow to prioritise homelessness as a critical issue, often viewing it as a social problem rather than one that requires systemic policy reform (29). In addition, faith-based and welfare organisations have been instrumental in providing immediate relief, such as food, shelter, and healthcare services, to the homeless population (30). However, these efforts lack the comprehensive, long-term solutions that are necessary to address the root causes of homelessness.

In these contexts, homelessness is often addressed from the standpoint of neighbourhood rehabilitation and urban renewal initiatives rather than through systemic housing solutions. While such programs can provide temporary relief, they typically fail to address the underlying structural issues contributing to homelessness, such as poverty, housing scarcity, and inadequate social safety nets.

From a physical planning perspective, the implications of homelessness are significant. Urban planners and policymakers must consider the availability of affordable housing, the accessibility of support services, and the integration of homelessness prevention strategies into broader urban development plans. The increasing recognition of homelessness as a complex, multifaceted issue necessitates a shift towards comprehensive, evidence-based interventions, such as permanent supportive housing that prioritise the dignity and stability of individuals while addressing the systemic causes of homelessness.

Against this backdrop, permanent supportive housing is a proven, effective model for addressing chronic homelessness. Combining stable housing with individualised support services provides a long-term solution to a pervasive social issue. While developed nations have made significant strides in adopting such approaches, there remains a pressing need for similar comprehensive, policy-driven responses in developing countries, where homelessness is often addressed through humanitarian efforts. As global awareness of homelessness continues to grow, policymakers at all levels must prioritise the creation of sustainable housing solutions and supportive services to combat homelessness and improve the lives of those affected.

Theoretical Framework

The theory adopted for this study is the social exclusion theory. It is explained briefly below.

Social Exclusion Theory

The theory was developed in Europe during the 1980s. Social exclusion offers a multidimensional perspective on disadvantage (31). Social exclusion is a concept that emphasises the structural dimensions of poverty and marginality. Exclusion can be viewed as a systematic process of being denied participation in decision-making and thus experiencing a sense of powerlessness. On another note, it can be regarded as a process where individuals are denied rights, opportunities, and resources typically available to others (32). This exclusion may be social, political, cultural or emotional, resulting in segmented societies where outsiders are systematically denied access to resources that could alleviate poverty. The theory of social exclusion further links globalisation to emerging societal issues, including the phenomenon of homelessness and its proliferation in urban areas.

Methodology

The research was conducted in Lagos metropolis. The study area is situated between latitude 6° 22' and 6° 52' N and longitude 2° 42' and 3° 42' E. Lagos Metropolis comprise 16 of the 20 Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Lagos State. It is bordered in the Northern and Eastern regions by Ogun State, in the West by the Republic of Benin, and in the south by the Atlantic coastline (Figure 1). The metropolis is witnessing an increase in population and development possibilities,

accompanied by physical and political expansion. All of which have brought about several challenges of various forms and varying levels. One of these problems is the shortage of adequate and affordable housing. More so, the influx of people

into cities, particularly Lagos, in search of “greener pastures”, without assurance of where to live, also accounts greatly for the spread of homelessness (3).

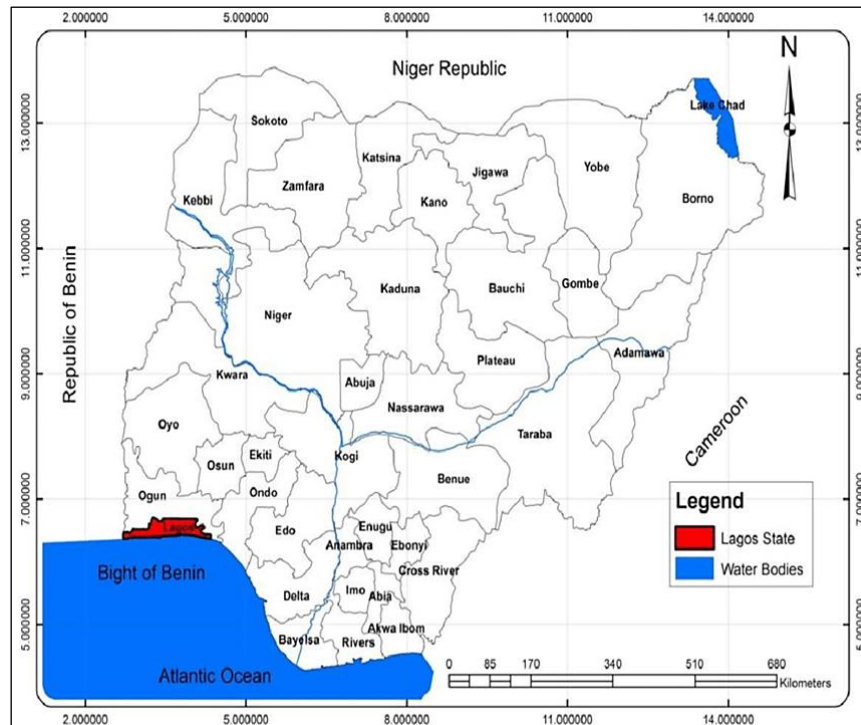


Figure 1: Lagos State in the Context of Nigeria (33)

The research adopted the mixed-method approach comprising both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Information for the study was derived through a reconnaissance survey, participant observation, in-depth interviews and questionnaire administration and secondary data. The study focused on responses to the phenomenon of homelessness, both from the government and the homeless. The study adopted the use of secondary data to obtain the responses from the government. To assess the suitability and efficacy of these responses, the study also considered the views of the homeless. To select the homeless, convenience sampling was adopted. With this method, homeless people were conveniently selected in major markets, transport

terminals and beaches in each of the selected LGAs. Sampled homeless persons provided much-needed assistance in reaching other homeless people who were either hidden or hard to contact. While there was no limit to the number of homeless individuals to be so selected, convenient sampling through the “catch can catch” process also provided the necessary impetus for reaching the homeless persons in Lagos Metropolis. The saturation point for this study was simply when there was no new information to be obtained. Using this procedure, 239 homeless people were identified, although only 188 could be contacted and sampled (Table 1). The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics.

Table 1: Estimated Number of Homeless People in Selected Clusters

Densities	Selected LGAs	Selected Clusters	Homeless People Identified
Low	Ojo	Iyana-Iba Motor Park	15
	Ikeja	Ikeja Flyover	25
Medium	Alimosho	Iyana-Ipaja Market	20
		Iyana-Ipaja Motor Park	25
		Iyana-Ipaja BRT Terminal	09

High	Lagos Island	Idumota Market	35
		Obalende Motor Park	30
	Mushin	Mushin Market	20
	Oshodi-Isolo	Oshodi Pedestrian Bridge	30
		Public Beaches	30
Total	5	9	239 (188)

Results and Discussion

Presented in this section are the responses to the phenomenon of homelessness and the homeless in Lagos Metropolis. The term “responses” in relation to homelessness generally refers to the various strategies and policies implemented to address and mitigate homelessness (34). More so, global issues such as homelessness and housing deprivation, physical displacement and cross-border migration, and poverty alleviation have become intertwined (29). Only those nations that address these issues through comprehensive national policies and strategies appear to be making progress, particularly if those policies and strategies consider regional and local differences and successfully accommodate all. In addition, most of these policies are often reactive, where nations prefer to offer a short-term solution, rather than a long-term preventive solution.

Government’s Responses to

Homelessness and the Homeless

To acknowledge the significance of addressing homelessness and ensuring the well-being of the homeless, the Nigerian government developed various policies and initiated several programs in response to their specific needs. Two of these initiatives— National housing policies and programs and poverty reduction policies and programs— are discussed in this study. For clarity in this study, “policy” refers to a guiding principle or course of action established by governments or non-governmental organisations, while “program” denotes a specific plan designed to achieve a particular objective.

National Housing Policies and Programs

The national housing sector policies and programs, and particularly those of Lagos State, need a holistic review. This is because it will equip the government with measures on how to respond to homelessness. These policies reflect government intentions and priorities, and the effectiveness of these policies serves as a basis for evaluating public policies. As noted by scholars, the

effectiveness of Nigeria’s housing policies plays a crucial role in guiding subsequent housing initiatives (35, 36-38). This is because these policies incorporate a broader spectrum of housing concerns, such as strategies for urban and rural housing provision, land accessibility and affordability, development of prototype designs, culturally and climatically suitable materials, and user preferences.

Furthermore, the housing policy extends into sectors key for housing delivery, including health, finance and infrastructure. Institutions such as the Federal Mortgage Bank of Nigeria were authorised to offer financial support for housing research, construction, and delivery. Additionally, the Nigerian Building and Research Institute were tasked with conducting comprehensive research on housing-related studies, while the Standard Organisation of Nigeria was responsible for maintaining the quality of building materials and construction standards. Other key stakeholders supported by the policy include the Real Estate Development Association of Nigeria and the Building Materials Producers Association of Nigeria.

Central to the policy framework is infrastructure development, as it promotes access to key facilities (clean water, communication, transportation, and electricity). The enactment of the Mortgage Institution Decree No. 53 in 1989 laid the groundwork for mortgage operations in Nigeria. Additionally, the policy advocates the involvement of government agencies, non-governmental organisations, and community-based groups in housing production and delivery. Measures such as tax exemptions on mortgage loans and subsidies for residential builders, promotion of local building materials, were also incorporated. In spite of the longstanding housing challenges, the policy has only had a limited impact on actual housing outcomes.

In addition, the government’s efforts in formulating and implementing the National Housing Policy are commendable (39). However, it is important to note that these efforts have not led

to significant improvements, as many Nigerians remain homeless or continue to live in deteriorating and substandard conditions. In other words, it lacks effective mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation, and review. The policy and the housing sector, in general, lack adequate systems for appraisal (36, 39).

Housing policy in Nigeria has a long history, extending back to the country's early days. It has evolved through five historical eras. This includes the colonial era (pre-1960), the post-independence era (1960-1979), the second civilian administration (1979-1983), the military era (1984-1999), and the post-military era (1999 to the present). During the colonial era, the focus was primarily on providing housing for expatriates and local staff in various organisations. Key milestones achieved included the creation of Urban Councils in 1946 and, later in 1954, the Lagos Executive Board. This is followed by the formation of the Nigerian Building Society in 1955 and, in 1959, the establishment of the Regional Housing Corporation. Between 1960 and 1979, there were notable improvements through the First National Development Plan (1962-1968) and the Second National Development Plan (1970-1974). The formation of the National Council on Housing in 1971 and the Third National Development Plan (1975-1980) further enhanced housing programs, policies, and delivery in Nigeria.

The conversion of the Nigerian Building Society into the Federal Mortgage Bank of Nigeria under Decree No. 7 of 1977 and the 1978 Land Use Decree marked a turning point in land access and tenure reform. Furthermore, Nigeria's 1979 Constitution emphasised the importance of using indigenous building materials and bolstering the construction sector. That same year witnessed the enactment of the Employees Housing Scheme Decree No. 54, which facilitated the development of staff housing and housing estates.

In the 1980s and 1990s, a policy shift was experienced, with rural areas being largely neglected while housing improvements were focused on urban centres. This shift was driven by rapid urbanisation and the resulting housing shortages in cities. During the military era, housing policies and delivery saw further enhancements, notably through the introduction of the Mortgage Institutions Decree No. 53 of 1989. This decree advanced the key objectives of the National

Housing Policy. Additionally, Babangida's Economic Liberalisation Policy encouraged private sector involvement in housing. This period also saw the enactment of the Urban and Regional Planning Decree 88 of 1992 and the National Housing Fund Decree No. 3 of 1992. The National Housing Fund was tasked with ensuring a steady flow of funds for housing construction and delivery.

Before the turn of the millennium, the "housing for all by the year 2000" initiative was introduced. Although this policy was pursued with vigour, it faced significant administrative challenges that prevented its full realisation by the target year. More so, in 2002, the Housing and Urban Development Policy was established to address the shortcomings of the Land Use Act and to facilitate land banking and ownership within a free market economy. The post-military era has seen notable improvements in Nigeria's housing sector. However, federal policies on monetisation and privatisation have undermined the goals of housing policies and programs. Additional obstacles to housing delivery in Nigeria include the high cost of building materials, insufficient finance, short-term lending preferences, high rates of rural-to-urban migration, and widespread poverty.

Lagos State Housing Policy

In line with the 2011 National Housing Policy, which permits state governments to develop their own housing policies and programs within their broader framework, the Lagos State government has established its housing objectives. These objectives focus on providing affordable housing for its growing population through initiatives such as the Home Ownership and Rent-to-Own Schemes, public-private partnership models, reforms to the Land Use Act, and the introduction of the Mortgage and Property Law of 2010 (40). These goals are central to the mission of the state's Ministry of Housing, which aims to offer high-quality, affordable homes, promote investment in quality housing, and support both private and public sector housing delivery while protecting property rights.

The Lagos State Housing Policy mandates that the State create opportunities for affordable housing by offering a variety of housing options at reasonable prices. It also involves launching programs to boost housing demand, such as providing land subsidies to private developers and

implementing a shared equity scheme, where a portion of each project's units is allocated for affordable housing under this scheme (41). Thus, the state housing policy aligns with the National Housing Policy and aims to achieve the same objectives.

To advance the State's housing policy, the Lagos State Mortgage and Property Law was enacted to create the State Mortgage Board, foster the expansion of mortgage financing for real estate, and regulate consumer loans related to property acquisition and the realisation of securities. This law aligns with the National Housing Policy's goal of creating a supportive environment for the growth of the mortgage finance industry. It also supports the National Housing Policy's focus on developing foreclosure laws. Despite all these policies, the housing needs of the public have still not been met due to bureaucratic bottlenecks, unaffordability, poor implementation processes, land scarcity, corruption and nepotism, and allocation processes (42). Moreover, it has been identified that cost and affordability, the implementation of policy objectives, mortgage financing, and tensions between the government and the community as factors that contribute to the failure of public housing policies in Lagos State (43).

Initial Efforts in Providing Housing in Lagos, Nigeria

The lack of a well-defined, affordable housing strategy during the colonial era is often seen as a factor in the underperformance of Nigeria's housing sector. Although the Lagos Executive Development Board was established in 1928, its primary purpose was to prevent a recurrence of the plague that had devastated Lagos in 1926. Initially, the LEDB was not intended to focus on infrastructure (44-47). However, to address housing issues, the LEDB was eventually restructured into the Nigerian Building Society (NBS) in 1956. This shift marked a new direction for housing in independent Nigeria from 1960, modelled after the UK's mortgage companies, aiming to enhance housing access in both the public and private sectors. Because the colonial administration was based in Lagos, the city experienced much greater housing demand compared to the rest of the country, driven by rural-urban migration and factors such as job

opportunities and a dynamic social environment (36).

Additionally, due to the city's previous division into government-reserved areas and slum districts, the newly established Nigerian Building Society was tasked with overseeing the development of various housing plans and the redevelopment of deteriorating core areas. This initiative supported housing projects in local government areas such as Surulere, Ikeja, Ikoyi, Yaba, and Ebute-Metta (36). Despite the new LEDB board's efforts to address housing needs, the supply fell short of demand because the zoning program did not account for homeownership among low and middle-income earners (42).

The rapid urbanisation of Lagos State over the years has significantly contributed to its high population growth. This expansion has compelled successive governments to tackle policy issues related to affordable housing. Despite various government housing policies, they have often failed to effectively address the housing shortfall, particularly impacting unemployed and low-income earners, who constitute the majority of the population. This has resulted in homelessness, slum settlements, social issues and insufficient housing delivery in the state. Evidence from the Lagos State strategy document indicates that approximately 4 million housing units are required to bridge the housing gap (47). Over 75 percent of Nigerians live in informal settlements, necessitating the construction of more than 18 million housing units (47).

Poverty Alleviation Policies and Programs

The approach to tackling homelessness in Lagos is built upon Nigeria's broader poverty reduction policies and initiatives. The adverse effects of poverty are particularly evident among low-income groups. A key objective of these poverty reduction efforts has been to disrupt the cycle of poverty. To this end, various Nigerian governments have implemented a series of poverty alleviation programs. Between the 1960s and 1980s, these efforts were primarily focused on the agricultural sector, based on the belief that poverty hindered rural development globally. The goal was to eliminate poverty, enhance the living standards of rural inhabitants, and boost agricultural productivity. Since rural areas, which make up over 90% of Nigeria's agricultural sector,

are thought to experience the highest levels of poverty, numerous programs were introduced to address this issue.

These initiatives were guided by recommendations from the World Bank and agricultural surveys of Nigeria. Prominent programs included the National Accelerated Food Production Programmes, the Nigeria Agricultural and Cooperative Bank, Operation Feed the Nation, the Directorate for Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure, and the Better Life Programme. These programs aimed to support peasant farmers and rural communities by improving their living conditions and increasing food production. However, it soon became evident to the government that the severe economic crises in Nigeria during the early 1980s had significantly deteriorated the quality of life for many Nigerians. The pervasive poverty became apparent through increased hunger, unemployment, homelessness, and the growing marginalisation of a large segment of the population. In response, several focused efforts were launched to tackle these issues, leading to the establishment of more comprehensive poverty alleviation programs. These included the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP), the National Poverty Eradication Programme, and the Economic Advancement Programme (EAP), among others.

During Babangida's administration, unemployment was recognised as a critical challenge threatening the nation's socio-political and economic stability. In response, the NDE was established in 1986 as a program for skill development and credit provision, aimed at fostering entrepreneurship. The NDE was created to offer self-employment opportunities to individuals in both rural and urban areas. Its primary goal is to design and execute programs to address widespread unemployment and develop policies for labour-intensive work programs (48). The scheme featured four main programs: The Vocational Skills Development Programme, Special Public Works, Small Scale Enterprises, and the Rural Employment Promotion Programme. The initiative achieved notable success, with reports indicating that by 2000, over 21,708 youths received vocational skills training across the 36 states and Abuja, and 5,075 individuals were trained in various trades (48).

Between 1993 and 1998, Nigeria fell back into the group of the 25 poorest countries globally (48). In an effort to combat severe poverty, the government under Late Sani Abacha launched the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP). The primary goal of FEAP was to boost economic activity by providing microcredit or soft loans directly to rural communities. This funding aimed to support the creation of small-scale industries and enhance storage facilities through cooperative societies and informal groups. Projects such as poultry farming, garri processing, soap production, and animal husbandry were financed through FEAP. By the end of its two-year run, FEAP had secured N7 billion in funding, with N3.3 billion allocated as loans to approximately 21,000 production-focused cooperative societies across the country (48).

In 2000, the Obasanjo administration introduced the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) as a temporary solution to address increasing unemployment and rising crime rates, particularly among Nigerian youth. The PAP allocated 50% of employment opportunities to youths, 25% to men, and 25% to women, with additional provisions for destitute and disabled individuals (48). However, in 2001, the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) was approved to replace PAP. NAPEP was a more comprehensive initiative aimed at devising strategies to eliminate absolute poverty in Nigeria. The program consisted of four main components: The Youth Empowerment Scheme, the Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme, Social Welfare Services, and the Natural Resources Development and Conservation Scheme. NAPEP was considered an advancement over the previous poverty alleviation efforts (48). With an initial grant of N6 billion in 2001, NAPEP established structures nationwide and trained 100,000 unemployed youths. Additionally, 5,000 individuals were trained as tailors and fashion designers and resettled. The program also supported approximately 50,000 unemployed graduates through its Mandatory Attachment Programme and created a comprehensive databank of unemployed youths across all 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. This data can be utilised for targeting groups in future poverty alleviation initiatives (48).

Despite the efforts of various poverty alleviation programs, the support provided to poor Nigerians

has often fallen short of expectations. Although numerous policies and programs have been introduced, poverty remains widespread in Nigeria, particularly among the homeless (49). The failure of these programs to achieve meaningful results can be attributed to several factors. Many of these policies were merely political slogans or statements, lacking substantive action. Successive governments have launched various poverty alleviation initiatives, but these programs are frequently abandoned soon after their introduction. Additionally, poor design and implementation have undermined the effectiveness of these poverty alleviation efforts. Moreover, many of Nigeria's poverty alleviation programs use a "top-down" approach rather than a "bottom-up" strategy. These programs often fail to involve the poor—who are the intended beneficiaries—in their planning and implementation (48). As a result, these initiatives are based on the mistaken belief that the poor form a homogenous group, and thus, a one-size-fits-all solution can be applied universally. Consequently, these programs often focus more on budget allocations and expenditures rather than on effectively addressing the root causes of poverty. They lack mechanisms for targeting the poor, do not directly address their specific needs, and fail to meet their requirements (49). Additionally, many programs have been politicised. Except for those initiated during the military regime, most poverty alleviation efforts under civilian rule have been co-opted by political parties and used to reward party loyalists who may not necessarily be poor. As a result, these programs often fail to reach the truly impoverished populations they are meant to serve. Corruption and poor governance represent significant obstacles to poverty alleviation programs in Nigeria. These programs have often been plagued by fraudulent activities and mismanagement, leading to resource wastage and ineffective outcomes. Frequently, funds designated for these programs are either misused within the program or diverted for other purposes (49). In addition, it is important to note that "poverty alleviation is now part of a broader macro-economic and political framework that emphasises good governance and attention to the social sector (49)." Good governance encompasses sound economic policies, promotion of liberalisation, democratisation, and the protection of human

rights. This suggests that the effectiveness of poverty alleviation efforts is closely linked to the quality of governance. Therefore, the persistent failure of poverty alleviation programs in Nigeria indicates underlying issues with governance.

Homeless People's Views

This section of the study collected primary data from the homeless to determine what they thought the government could do to address their situation. As read on the faces of most of the homeless persons, they were not happy sleeping rough. They really wanted to leave the street and live a normal life like other conventional people at home. As shown in Table 2, more than one-half of the sampled homeless (51.6%) reported provision of employment as the most important thing the government could do to address their situation. Following this was decent and affordable housing (37.2%). Very few sampled homeless persons opted for support (8.0%).

These findings highlight several critical implications for policymakers and service providers. Firstly, the strong emphasis on employment as a preferred intervention underscores a fundamental issue: many homeless individuals may view employment as the primary pathway to stability and self-sufficiency. This aligns with broader research indicating that economic self-reliance is crucial for long-term stability and recovery from homelessness (23). Employment can provide not only income but also a sense of purpose and connection, which are vital for mental well-being and social reintegration (50). Thus, policies and programs that focus on job training, employment support, and creating job opportunities specifically tailored for the homeless population could be highly beneficial.

On the other hand, the significant portion (37.2%) who see decent and affordable housing as critical suggests that while employment is highly valued, the lack of stable housing is also a major concern. This finding highlights the necessity of integrating housing-first approaches with employment support. The housing-first model, which prioritises providing stable housing without preconditions such as employment or sobriety, is effective in reducing homelessness and improving overall well-being (28). This approach suggests that ensuring access to affordable housing should remain a priority alongside efforts to enhance employment opportunities.

Again, the relatively low preference for support services (8.0%) might indicate that while such services are valuable, they may not be perceived as immediately impactful compared to employment and housing. However, this does not diminish the importance of mental health, addiction treatment, and other support services, which play a crucial role in addressing underlying issues that contribute to homelessness (51). The low ranking could reflect a desire for more tangible, immediate solutions rather than long-term supportive interventions.

When disaggregated by locations, it was observed that most of the sampled homeless persons in the markets and beaches opted for employment provision. These individuals respectively represented 60.0% and 70%. Meanwhile, in the transport terminals, the majority (46.9%) of the homeless persons elected for decent and affordable housing. The proportion of sampled homeless persons who opted for support such as mental health, addiction treatment, and other support services accounted for 8.0% (Table 2).

Table 2: Responses to what the Government Can Do for the Homeless

Homeless People's Views	Locations of the Homeless			
	Markets Freq (%)	Transport Terminals Freq (%)	Beaches Freq (%)	Total Freq (%)
Provide employment	36(60.0)	40(40.8)	21(70.0)	97(51.6)
Provide decent and affordable housing	22(36.7)	46(46.9)	8(26.7)	76(40.4)
Provide support services	2(3.3)	12(12.2)	1(3.3)	15(8.0)
Total	60(100.0)	98(100.0)	30(100.0)	188(100.0)

The above data suggest that the needs of sampled homeless individuals vary depending on their environment. For those in markets and on beaches, employment might be seen as the most immediate and practical solution to their situation. This preference could be related to the nature of these locations, which are often associated with informal and transient economic activities. Employment provision in such contexts can offer immediate financial relief and a step towards stability. The high percentages (60.0% and 70%) of those prioritising employment in these areas reflect the urgent need for income-generating opportunities, which aligns with findings that suggest economic activity plays a crucial role in improving conditions for the homeless (52).

Conversely, the preference for decent and affordable housing (46.9%) and support services (12.2%) among those at transport terminals reflects different priorities. Transport terminals, where individuals may stay temporarily while seeking longer-term solutions, highlight the need for stable housing and comprehensive support services. The emphasis on housing aligns with the housing-first approach, which prioritises providing stable, affordable housing as a foundation for addressing other issues related to homelessness (40). Stable housing can significantly impact overall well-being and

stability, making it a critical component in long-term solutions for homelessness. More importantly, the Lagos State government should prioritise the provision of cheaper housing schemes as well as integrating community-based solutions in order to reduce the prevalence of homelessness.

Limitations of the Study

While this study provides crucial insights into the prevalence of homelessness, certain limitations should be noted. First, some homeless persons were reluctant to share their lived experiences, fearing the data might be used by the government authorities to justify evictions. Second, those who participated and shared their lived experiences often required monetary incentives, which may have influenced the depth and candour of their responses. Despite these limitations, the study advances understanding of responses to homelessness in the Global North, offering lessons that can be adapted to Lagos and other cities in the Global South.

Conclusion

The study concludes that homelessness is a multifaceted issue influenced by several interconnected factors. It highlights the gap between the well-intentioned policies and programs aimed at addressing homelessness in

Nigerian cities, including Lagos, and their actual effectiveness. While a lot of efforts, whether genuine or fake, have been geared towards addressing the plights of homeless people through varying policies and programs, protecting the rights of the homeless and safeguarding their welfare in Nigeria generally and Lagos State in particular still remain a mere aspiration. The failure of these policies was attributed to issues such as bureaucratic mismanagement, poor implementation, corruption, and a lack of alignment between the needs of the homeless and the policies designed to assist them. In line with existing literature, homeless persons stated that the government's most crucial support to them would be offering employment opportunities and affordable housing in locations that meet their specific needs.

This study does not claim to be exhaustive in addressing the phenomenon of homelessness in Nigeria. Further research is needed across different geopolitical zones in Nigeria to corroborate and extend these findings. Future studies should also examine how different categories of homelessness overlap or interact and assess the effectiveness of targeted interventions for each type. In addition, exploring the relationship between substance abuse and homelessness, including the prevalence of different substances and their impact on homelessness and reintegration efforts, would be valuable. Research should also investigate the effectiveness of integrated support systems that combine housing, employment, and social services. Therefore, by addressing these areas in different geopolitical zones in the country, future research can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of homelessness and inform more effective interventions and policies.

Recommendations

Collaborative Efforts among Non-Profit, Public and Private Organisations, and Homeless Persons' Involvement in Decision-Making

Helping homeless individuals necessitates collaborative efforts among non-profit, public, and private organisations. The growing number of homeless people and the effects of homelessness on the physical, social, and economic fabric of cities demand fresh engagement from both the government and the private sector. Homeless individuals should also be actively involved in

matters that affect them. While appropriate support is beneficial, it should be organised with their input. Any plans made for them should be informed by their own experiences with homelessness and their experiences beyond it. They should be included in meetings about homelessness strategies to contribute their perspectives. Solutions for addressing homelessness or preventing its recurrence are most effectively developed by those who have experienced homelessness themselves or are now living independently after it.

Urban Planning and Management

Arising from the residents' standpoint and observations that homelessness has an adverse impact on urban planning and infrastructure, characterised by strained services, crime, disrupted land use, health risks, and negative effects on urban aesthetics, attempts at addressing the phenomenon should not be without recourse to urban planning and management. Therefore, attention must be given to developing and implementing policies to manage urban spaces and informal settlements. The urban spaces and settlements should be designed with greater sensitivity towards the needs of vulnerable groups, including the homeless. This does not necessitate a complete redesign of current planning and design practices but rather the political will and technical expertise to apply sustainable principles. These principles include mixed land uses that enhance social and economic opportunities, pedestrian-friendly and human-scale development, and crime prevention through environmental design.

Abbreviations

EAP: Economic Advancement Programme, FEAP: Family Economic Advancement Programme, LEDB: Lagos Executive Development Board, LGA: Local Government Area, NDE: National Directorate of Employment, NAPEP: National Poverty Eradication Programme, PAP: Poverty Alleviation Programme, PSH: Permanent Supportive Housing, RRH: Rapid-rehousing.

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Author Contributions

Oyedele Olajide: conceptualization, conducted the fieldwork, curated the data, drafted the manuscript, Abel Afon: critically revised the manuscript for intellectual content, Gbemiga Faniran: critically revised the manuscript for intellectual content, Henry Afolabi: analysed the data, Grace Oladunni: formatted the manuscript for submission. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Declaration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Assistance

The authors declare that no generative AI or AI assisted technologies were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

Ethics Approval

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