Using Indigenous Knowledge to strenghten Local Governance and to counter Urban Inequality in Nigeria

Geoffrey I. NWAKA

Professor, Abia State University, Uturu, Nigeria.

Indigenous knowledge is now celebrated by many of its advocates as "the single largest knowledge resource not yet mobilized in the development enterprise" (Paul Richard, in Warren et al, 1996, 476). Recent titles like "Tradition as a Modern Strategy", "Modern Dilemmas and Traditional Insights", "The Indigenization of Modernity", and so on reflect the growing prominence accorded culture and tradition in current development thinking and research. For a long time, African customs and traditions were misperceived as irrational and incompatible with the conventional strategies for economic development, or at any rate as ineffective in coping with present day needs and challenges. But with the economic crisis of the 1980s and 90s, and the policy failures associated with the formal government system, there has been increasing loss of faith in the Wester 'external agency' model of development imposed from the top by national governments and international development agencies. The undue emphasis which this pattern of development places on purely economic and quantitative growth is now blamed for the worsening problems of environmental degradation, widespread poverty, inequality, and the undermining of those values and institutions which hold these negative forces in check.

The renewed interest in indigenous knowledge and institutions is in line with the current advocacy of the minimalist state and the 'enabling approach' as condition for good governance in a period of structural adjustment and public sector reform. Governments are urged by donor agencies, and are in fact obliged to reduce their role to what their dwindling resources and capacities permit; to decentralize the structure of governance, promote genuine partnership, and enlist the broad participation of non state actors and stakeholders, including traditional institutions and other community and civil society organizations. This trend has been reinforced by the UNESCO sponsored "World Decade for Cultural Development" (1988-1997), and other global initiatives which emphasize the cultural dimension of development, and the need to take local knowledge and practice fully into account in the development process (UNESCO 1995; Seragaldin and Teboroff; 1994).

- This paper considers how indigenous knowledge and practice can be put to good use in support of local government and public administration in Nigeria, especially in the current efforts to alleviate poverty and counter social inequality and exclusion. The problems of poverty, neglect and exclusion are most pronounced at the local community level, in the villages and urban slums, where these communities ought to be encouraged to participate in, and bring their own agendas to bear on governance and development. It is at the local community level that indigenous knowledge appears to have the greatest potential to contribute to development if development policies and programmes are made to reflect local priorities, and build upon, and strengthen local knowledge, organisation and capacity.

- One of the primary concerns of the Millennium Development Goals is to improve the health and living conditions of at least 100 million slum dwellers around the world by the year 2020 (UN-Habitat 2003). These slums and irregular settlement have become so pervasive in Africa that they now outnumber legally planned developments, and their social legitimacy appears to be no longer in question; but the appalling environmental conditions associated with them constitute a major threat to the health and well-being of the urban community. Part of the policy challenge addressed by the paper is how to support and regulate the urban informal sector and irregular settlements in order to promote shelter and livelihood for the poor, and at the same time ensure a safe, healthy and socially acceptable environment; how to ensure that the struggle against urban poverty and slum dwelling does not result in a campaign against the urban poor and slum dwellers themselves. The paper examines how urban poverty and the informal city have developed in Nigeria over the last 50 years; the extent to which government policies and programmes have helped or constrained the poor, and how these slums and irregular settlements can be upgraded and progressively integrated into the urban mainstream. It considers how housing and planning codes, standards and regulations inherited from the discriminatory policies and segregation of the colonial period have continued to inhibit the access of the poor to affordable housing and tenure security; how the inadequate provision of water, sanitation and waste management has led to the growth of a wide variety of water-borne and filth-related disease. The aim is to identify the lessons that could help to promote a more positive view and policy regarding the urban poor and the informal city.

- The concluding section considers the essential elements of a strategy to improve the informal city and the conditions of the poor, paying particular attention to the roles which state and local authorities, the international development community and the urban poor themselves could play in a collaborative effort to build safer, healthier, more inclusive and more equitable cities. It also considers how to enlist indigenous knowledge and traditionally based institutions in urban neighbourhoods and the informal sector in the effort to ameliorate the adverse effects of rapid urbanisation, especially in the critical areas of housing, environmental health, infrastructure improvement and service delivery. Finally, paper comments briefly on the indigenous knowledge movement as an appropriate local response to the growing tempo of globalization and to Western knowledge dominance in African development.

1 RESEARCH ISSUES AND POLICY DEBATES:

To mark five years of its indigenous knowledge programme the World Bank recently issued an impressive collection of papers and essays aptly titled *Indigenous Knowledge: Local Pathways to Global Development* (World Bank 2004b). It is in the sense of "local pathways to global development" that this paper perceives glocalization, although the concept is also used to refer to mutually beneficial cooperation among cities and municipalities, and to the role which cities can play in international politics and diplomacy to reform globalization and redress some of the adverse social and economic effects of mindless globalization(Savir,2003). Indigenous knowledge (also sometimes referred to as local knowledge, traditional wisdom, or ethnoscience) is used in different ways by different

researchers and advocates, and there are many unresolved debates about how it relates to modern science and other knowledge systems.

- The wider scientific questions of concepts and method in the study of indigenous knowledge, and the practical problems of applying this knowledge and its lessons to development policy and practice cannot be addressed in details here (see Agarawal, 1995; Sillitoe 1998); Blunt and Wanen (1996) The concepts is used here to refer to the vast and largely undocumented body of knowledge, wisdom, skills and expertise which a given community has developed over time, and continues to develop as it grapples with the challenges of its environment, with outside ideas and with constantly changing conditions. It represents the heritage of creative thought and practical everyday life which is passed on orally or through experience from one generation to the next. It is usually tacit knowledge, stored in the peoples individual or collective memories, hence the saying that "each time an elder dies, it is as if a library had burned down". (Easton in World Bank 2004b, p. 208; cf. SCESSAL/LIUASA, 2002). Scholars from a wide variety of disciplines study and seek to apply indigenous knowledge in their own way; but in this paper, it is used simply as a way to introduce a locally informed and endogenous perspective in development policy and practice. Indigenous knowledge is conceived as a means of rethinking and redirecting development in agriculture, health care, natural resource management, etc, and also as a way to involve and enable local actors to participate in their own development.

- It must be emphasized that both indigenous knowledge and modern science are not really in competition or in conflict with each other. Each has some elements of the other. Very few if any serious scholars actually consider indigenous knowledge to be an exclusive alternative to modern science and technology; nor is the exclusive use of modern science enough for the complex tasks of achieving sustainable development in diverse cultural and ecological contexts (World Bank 2004; Haverkot etal, 2002). The real challenge is how not to romanticize indigenous knowledge or idealize modern science as both have their strengths and limitations, and should complement and not confront or undermine each other. The UNESCO World Commission for Cultural Development recommends the active recognition and exploitation of cultural pluralism and "Our Creative Diversity"; and even the International Council of Science has recently urged "governments to support cooperation between holders of traditional knowledge and scientists, to explore the relationships between different knowledge systems and to foster inter-linkages of mutual benefit". (ICSU/UNESCO, 2003; UNESCO 1995).

- There are also many unresolved debates regarding the informal city in Africa; especially about how the informal sector reflects local knowledge and conditions, and what the appropriate government policies towards the sector ought to be. Some of the more optimistic advocates of the sector tend to present it in romantic terms as a form of popular development, a vital source of employment and income for the poor, the seedbed of local entrepreneurship, and a potent instrument in the campaign to combat poverty and social exclusion (Danida 1997; De Soto 1989, 2000. They also condemn the large number of regulations and bureaucratic procedures from the different institutions and levels of government which tend to stifle entrepreneurship, and to inhibit the realization of the full potential of the informal sector (Durand-Lasserve et al, 2002; McAuslan, 1987, 1992; UN-Habitat 1998, 2003).

- On the other hand critics, including many planners and government authorities dismiss the informal sector as an anomaly, a source of disorder, and an obstacle to the development of a modern economy (Abumere et al, 1998; Sachs, 1997). They condemn the slums, health risks, insecurity and exploitation associated with the sector, and hope that like other transitory phases in the course of development, the sector will wither away with time and economic progress. Even those who idealize the sector recognize that it is at best a mixed blessing: "In-so-far as informal sector activities do not respect legal, social, health and quality standards, and furthermore do not pay tax, they violate the rules of fair competition" (Sachs, 1997). Indeed they argue that the urban informal sector has run its course; is now saturated, and may just be replicating the disguised unemployment that prevails in the rural areas.

- These conflicting positions pose a difficult dilemma for planners and policy makers, and tend to reinforce the ambivalence and hostility of official attitudes towards the sector. If the informal sector thrives because of its informality, and because rules and regulations are minimal, does it make sense to try to formalize and integrate it into the formal economy with laws, codes and standards that could disrupt its activities and growth? On the other hand, what about the health hazards, as well as the rights and safety of the vulnerable groups that work in the sector (Rogerson, 1996, 1997; ILO 1991?

- Current research suggests however that the path to urban sustainability lies in greater realism in building and managing a more inclusive and socially equitable city. This would involve reviewing continuously the legislative and administrative environment in order to improve the security of land and housing tenure for the poor, to upgrade slums, and to strengthen urban local governance through broad-based partnerships that take the needs and participation of the poor in the informal sector fully into account (Fernandes et al, 1998; N-AERUS, 2001).

2   THE NIGERIA URBAN SCENE:

Nigeria is the largest and potentially the richest country in Africa, being the sixth largest oil producing country in the world. It has a land area of close to one million square kilometers, and a population of well over 125 million. Estimates at the turn of the century suggest that 43.5 per cent of the population live in urban areas, and this percentage is projected to reach 50 per cent by the year 2010, and 65 per cent by 2020. The rate of urban growth is about 5.5 percent, roughly twice the national population growth rate of 2.9 percent. More than seven cities have populations that exceed one million, and over 5,000 towns and cities of various sizes have populations of between twenty and five hundred thousand. Greater Lagos, the former national capital, has grown from 1.4 million in 1963 to 3.5 million in 1975; is currently about six million, and projected to be 24 million by 2020. Information on the size and employment structure in the informal sector is hard to obtain, but estimates suggest that the sector accounts for between 45 and 60 per cent of the urban labour force, up from about 25 percent in the mid '60s. Sadly, life expectancy at birth is still about 52 years; infant mortality rate is as high as 19.1 per 1000; and the per capita income is only USD 274 (Okunlola, 2001; Nwaka, 1992).

- The development of the informal sector follows closely the general pattern of urban development in the country. A large number of the cities pre-date British colonial rule and still have large indigenous populations. With the establishment of British colonial rule, European Reservations and migrant quarters were grafted onto these native towns. British colonial rule neither anticipated nor approved of the growth of large African urban populations. Although many port cities, rail-side towns and administrative centres owed their growth to the activities generated by European presence, colonial officials remained unreconciled to the idea of rapid urban growth, and tended to see the cities as an unfortunate by-product of colonial activities which had to be firmly contained in order to avoid political subversion and social disorganisation. The towns were not conceived or promoted as centres for industrial production for job creation and self-sustaining growth, but rather as small enclaves for administration, colonial trade and transportation. The policies and institutions for urban development, where such policies existed at all, were very restrictive and myopic, especially in the critical areas of land use control, planning and the provision of infrastructure and services. Planning and housing were used as instruments of segregation and social policy - to ensure that the small community of Europeans was protected in segregated high quality residential reservations. Zoning and sanitary segregation became an obsession (Stock, 1988; Nwaka, 1996). Sadly, the laws, codes, regulations and institutions designed at the time for the small populations envisaged in colonial cities have been inherited with little rethinking by post-colonial administrations, and have naturally been quickly overtaken and overwhelmed by the process of rapid urban growth and post-colonial transformation. Many analysts have observed in post-colonial Nigeria and other African countries a

"new process of urbanization unleashed by the masses of relatively low income migrants, who have flocked into the cities since independence, and are seeking to solve their problems of accommodation and employment informally, and on their own terms...; the urban poor are now dominant, and in most cases are transforming the city to meet their needs, often in conflict with official laws and plans" (Mabogunje, 1992, 1995; Stren 1989).

Although government did not take much official notice of the informal sector in the 1960s and '70s except to seek to eradicate the slums and disorder associated with them, the economic crisis and adjustment programmes of the 1980s and '90s have led to the massive expansion of the informal city. Cutbacks in public spending, drop in real wages, and public sector retrenchment and other austerity measures have swelled the ranks of the informal sector, and weakened the employment and law enforcement capacity of the state. (Meagher and Yunusa, 1991). Official response to the situation has been mixed and often contradictory, including incentives and 'safety nets' to the sector in the form of training credit and other facilities for self-employment, but also repression by overzealous officials in the prosecution of the so-called "War Against Environmental Indiscipline", during military rule in the 1980s, as well as the forced eviction of large numbers of "squatters" in Lagos and other cities.

3   THE CONVENTIONAL OFFICIAL RESPONSE

The informal sector encompasses a wide range of areas of informality -- environmental, spatial, economic and social, covering business activities, employment, markets, settlements and neighbourhoods. Each of these areas has implications for public policy. The informal sector has since the early days of national independence been the major provider of land and housing in the cities, as only about 20 to 40 per cent of the physical developments in the cities is carried out with formal government approval, and are provided with reasonably adequate urban infrastructure and services. (Abumere 1982; Population Report, 2002). Government officials often argue that the practical difficulties of upgrading irregular settlements and connecting them to urban infrastructure and services tend to reinforce their social and physical exclusion, while others argue that official restrictions on the availability of land, and their bureaucratic procedures encourage the growth of more and more irregular settlements on the fringes of the cities and on empty public land.

- In respect of the policies for planning and housing, only a small percentage of Nigerians, mainly top government functionaries, professionals and other rich and privileged people benefit from the formal housing and planning schemes of government. The vast majority of the urban population rely on the informal sector for shelter, and many of the houses in this sector are over-crowded, structurally defective, and sometimes located in areas that do not provide adequate defenses against disease vectors and other health hazards. The legacies of colonial planning and housing have tended to reinforce physical and social divide between the 'formal' and the 'informal' city. The Nigerian Town and Country Planning Ordinance introduced by the colonial regime in 1946 remained virtually unchanged until 1992, not because it was working satisfactorily but because it was largely ignored and by-passed by rapid growth and spontaneous development. Most of the legislation and by-laws for environmental health and sanitation appear to the local people as reminders of colonial segregation and oppression, and have very little current relevance or legitimacy. For instance, residential areas are now widely used for small businesses, in complete disregard of the official zoning arrangements to separate areas of presumed incompatible activities. Although a revised Nigerian Urban and Regional Planning Law was introduced in 1992 to address some of the anomalies of the 1946 law, the administrative and technical institutions needed to implement the provisions of the new legislation are yet to be put in place (Egunjobi, 2002) Also, the Nigerian Land Use Decree or Act, introduced in 1978 to streamline the wide variety of pre-existing land practices, to curb land speculation, and facilitate equitable access to land for bona fide public and private uses has been moved by official arbitrariness and bureaucratic delays, and now constitutes a major blockage on land supply except for the rich and well connected individuals (Nwaka 1992).

- In respect of housing, Nigerian has experimented with virtually all the approaches that were fashionable in the 1960s, 1970s and '80s - viz, slum clearance (which caused much distress and social dislocation); sites and services schemes which tried to open up new land, and have it sub-divided into residential plots for distribution; slum or squatter upgrading which tried to fit new infrastructure and services into already disorderly and crowded

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settlements, etc. Following Habitat I in 1976, and the oil boom of the 1970s and early 80s, Nigeria embarked on elaborate programmes of public housing, but, typically, only about twelve percent of the additional 300,000 housing units projected for 1970-74, and twenty five per cent for 1975-80 was actually achieved. The enormous resources earmarked for the purpose were misappropriated or otherwise diverted to the construction of military barracks and other projects of doubtful priority. None of the housing programmes advanced the housing conditions of the poor in irregular settlements but instead tended to provide subsidized housing for high and middle income groups and other well connected persons.

- The environmental conditions in most towns and informal settlements remains appalling and life-threatening. Water supply and sanitation are grossly inadequate for domestic and personal hygiene, leading to a high incidence of water-borne and fifth-related disease. Commercial and domestic wastes are not properly disposed of, with the result that large volumes of rubbish are left to litter the streets and to accumulate in open dumps where flies and other disease carrying insects and rodents proliferate. The open drains are often clogged and exude unpleasant odor. Pot-holes in the streets, pools of stagnant water, and waste water gushing from bathrooms and kitchens provide breeding sites for malarial mosquitoes, and other disease vectors. Food contamination and poisoning, especially in the rapidly growing street foods and catering industry, pose a serious threat to public health; and air pollution, especially from exposure to toxic fumes from open cooking fires and stoves in poorly ventilated homes, is responsible for a wide variety of respiratory infections among women and children. (IIED/DANIDA 2001; Hardoy and Satterthwaite, 1989; McGranahan et al, 1999).

- Government authorities and planners have tended to blame these problems on the informal sector, and have sought to deal with the problem of informality through increased powers of control and regulation, by insisting on legal titles to land, public housing, mortgage finance, etc.; but these conventional approaches have usually by-passed the poor, still leaving the informal sector as the dominant provider of land and housing in large parts of the urban and peri-urban areas.

- Informal sector policies in the 1980s were very repressive, while the response to the sector in the 1990s was much more pragmatic and promotional. The military administration of General Buhari which overthrew the Second Republic was so dissatisfied with the state of the environment that it discontinued with the idea of central planning altogether. Instead, it initiated an aggressive campaign for environmental awareness and sanitation as the focus of the fifth phase of the so-called 'War Against Environmental Indiscipline' WAI. A large number of environmental task forces were set up by State Edicts to organize public enlightenment campaigns, and to enforce environmental discipline through mobile sanitation courts. Special days of the month were set aside for general clean up by everybody -- to unblock drains, clean residential and work places, and remove heap of rubbish. The cleanest cities were promised one million naira prize, and a definite improvement in the environment appeared to have been achieved, at least temporarily. Unfortunately, the potential merit of the programme was marred by overzealous officials and the military drive for quick results. The campaign soon became associated with the misguided drive to contain urban growth, and to restrain the informal sector, as the sector was blamed for all sorts of evil social influence -- littering the streets, obstructing traffic, creating various forms of pollution and nuisance, crime, piracy, prostitution, foreign exchange malpractices, etc. Informal sector enterprises such as hawking and other forms of street business were incessantly harassed and compelled to relocate in remote and inaccessible outskirts of the towns. Kiosks, illegal structures and shanty towns in Lagos, Kano, Port Harcourt and other state capitals were raided and ruthlessly demolished (Braimah, 1989; Nwaka, 1996).

- The military approach was certainly not a permanent solution to the problem, as it caused so much discontent and distress, and provoked many human rights activists. The government of General Babangida which overthrew Buhari showed little enthusiasm for environmental sanitation, and has credit for initiating a number of rural and urban social programmes to address the hardship and austerity that came in the wake of Structural Adjustment, notably the well funded Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure, DFFRI, and the Directorates for Employment, NDE, and so on. For the urban informal sector the most relevant initiatives were the establishment of the People's Bank, the Community Banks and the National Directorate for Employment. Access to credit is important to small business aspiring to grow and become more profitable. Between 1990 and 1992 the government established as many as 401 Community and People's Banks, modelled on the Asian experience, and on the principles of traditional rotational credit system. These banks were to provide small loans and other forms of financial and business services for the poor and informal sector enterprises, with the whole community acting as guarantor for loan repayment. Within two years these banks together had built up assets of over 981 million naira, mobilized over 640 million in savings and deposits, and disbursed 150 million naira as loans and advances (Mabogunje, 1995). Unfortunately, recent studies suggest that only about 10 per cent of informal sector workers interviewed were aware of how to take advantage of the new facilities offered by the Banks, and the Employment Directorate. Civil Servants, military officers' wives, and other well connected persons appear to have hijacked the scheme, often getting loans far in excess of the approved official maximum (Dike, 1997; Halfani, 1996).

- The National Directorate for Employment, established earlier in 1987/88, was meant to promote self-employment through training and credit to unemployed youths, but the main orientation of the programme has been to reverse rural-urban migration by encouraging investment in rural agriculture. The informal sector was thought to be already saturated, although the government also launched the National Open Apprenticeship Scheme, as part of the NDE, to support the placement of apprentices in informal sector workshops, and supplement their practical training with other forms of formal training for skills they would need in future for their enterprises. Again, only

a small percentage of unemployed youths and apprentices have benefited from the scheme, which appears to be undermined by underfunding and other forms of malpractice (Dike, 1997).

4   INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND IMPROVED URBAN GOVERNANCE

The Secretary General of the United Nations has recently identified good governance as "perhaps the single most important factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development". How does indigenous knowledge promote good governance? Much of the current thinking on good governance derives from the recommendations and plans of action of the United Nations-sponsored conferences of the 1990s -- on environment and development, on combating poverty and inequality, on human settlement improvement, gender, health and so on. All these congresses endorse the principles of *enablement, democratic decentralization, participation* and *partnership*, in addition, of course, to the other main elements of good governance such as accountability, transparency, pluralism, and so on.

- The major gap in the good governance agenda appears to be at the local level where the major issues of poverty reduction, popular participation, and support for an active civil society remain largely underresearched and unaddressed. It is also at the local level that indigenous knowledge appears to have the greatest potential to contribute to sustainable development. For most of his distinguished scholarly career, late Professor Claude Ake stressed the need for a home grown model of self-reliant development which can only come about if we learn to "build on the indigenous"

"We build on the indigenous by making it determine the form and content of development strategy; by ensuring that developmental change accommodate itself to these things, be the values, interests, aspirations and/or social institutions which are important to the life of the people. It is only when developmental change comes to terms with them that it can become sustainable." (Ake, 1988, p. 19).

- In his influential World Bank studies, Mamodou Dia with his group, has argued that the most promising way to overcome the shortcomings of the state system and its alien formal institutions in Africa is to recognise "the structural and functional disconnect between the informal, indigenous institutions rooted in the region's history and culture, and formal institutions mostly transplanted from outside" (Dia, 1996; cf Francis with others, 1996). The remedy he argues is to ensure "a reconnect between state and civil society", by identifying the opportunities within indigenous institutions for building a more pluralistic and participatory form of governance and development. Like the earlier UN conferences, the Habitat Agenda of 1996 also highlights the need for "partnership among countries and among all actors within countries. Good urban governance entails finding ways of engaging with the urban poor so that their needs can be reflected in the policies and programmes of city governments". (UNCHS-Habitat, 1998, para. 33)

- Many critics of the Nigerian urban scheme have likened the chaotic pattern of urban development in the country to building a house from the roof down:

... all the institutions of modern urbanization are in place - the banks, the factories, the legal system, the unions, etc.; but all these appear to be suspended over societies that have no firm connection to them, and whose indigenous institutions, even when oriented in the right direction lack the necessary scaffolding to connect them to their modern surrogates. (Mabogunje, 1995)

- The laws, codes and standards that operate in the cities were inherited from the colonial period, and are now applied with little rethinking by the local elite are bureaucrats. This anomalous state of affairs has led to the poor functioning of the cities, and the call for endogenizing or 'radicalizing' the institutional response to rapid urban growth, especially because there are still strong ties between urban and rural areas, and a large urban informal sector.

- To explain the poor performance of public sector management in the cities and elsewhere in Africa, Professor Ekeh has drawn a distinction between the morality of the 'civic public' associated with colonial rule and alien institutions on the one hand, and on the other the 'premodial public', associated with traditional sentiments, values and restraints in various indigenous societies and institutions. The political and administrative structures of the civic realm (the civil service, the police, the judiciary, etc.) were created by the alien colonizers, and therefore tend to elicit a negative and predatory response from the people who see government work as white man's work, and public resources as fair game. There is general apathy and cynicism towards government, and some ambivalence about accountability in governance. By contrast, the general attitude to the premodial realm (ethnic, clan or village) is much more selfless and transparent because of the cultural norms, obligations and sanctions that come into play. (Ekeh, 1975; cf Honey, and Okafor eds., 1998) This partly explains the pervasiveness of ethnic and clan unions in the cities, with strong links to home towns. The argument then is that these traditional values, attitudes and institutions should be consciously harnessed and brought to bear on governance and public affairs in the cities and other spheres of public life.

- In the same way, Dia's influential World Bank studies referred to earlier in the paper have urged for synergy or "institutional reconciliation" between state and community, through measures which increase the technical and organizational capacity of community institutions, and also create a more responsive and accountable public sector. Both formal and informal institutions are here to stay, and need to be made more flexible in their relationship to each other. The formal sector and its institutions need to adapt to local conditions for greater legitimacy and enforceability; informal sector institutions in some cases also need to be renovated and adjusted in order to remain relevant. Local institutions which are sometimes handicapped by limited skills and resources need support links to the budgetary and technical resources available in government and its numerous agencies. (Dia, 1996)

- This concept of institutional reconciliation can be given practical support in urban governance by consciously trying to integrate the vast informal sector to the economic and administrative mainstream; and by encouraging and utilizing

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informal urban neighbourhood associations, not only for the well known functions of local security and solidarity but also as active agents for governance and development. For instance, the South African Municipal Structures Act requires all Municipal Councils to develop mechanisms to consult and involve the community and community organizations through Ward Committees and other structures for consultation and collaboration. We have referred earlier in the paper to how the traditional system of rotational credit has influenced the establishment of Community Banks, and Peoples Banks in Nigeria. The challenges is, therefore, how best to build active institutional channels to mobilize and link up individuals and groups in the informal sector to the mainstream of urban government and development.

5 INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND THE PROMOTION OF THE INFORMAL CITY

The full potential of indigenous knowledge to promote sustainable urbanisation and to counter urban segregation and inequality can only be realized through the collaborative efforts of state and local authorities, the international development community and the predominantly poor inhabitants of the informal city. In this partnership, local governments are in the front line, and need to be strengthened in their technical, financial and administrative capacity through genuine decentralization and increased support from national governments and international development agencies. The concept of Local Agenda 21 of the Rio Earth Summit is based on the premise that local governments are better placed than distant central and state bureaucracies to promote local government and poverty reduction, especially if the citizens, rich and poor, are given a sense of involvement in making decisions about policies and programmes that affect them. The nearer government is brought to the people the more likely it is that the positive traditional norms, values and institutions referred to earlier in the paper will be brought to bear on the development effort. Unfortunately, the record of decentralization and local governance in Nigeria since the 1976 Local Government Reforms has been rather disappointing, in spite of the political rhetoric about power sharing and popular empowerment. (Fed. Rep. Nig., 1976; Olowo 1996, 2001) With the economic crisis of the 1980s and '90s, and the poor functioning of the state system, the tendency has been to off-load more and more functions onto the lower levels of government without the resources and institutional support needed to ensure effective performance; and no distinction is made in the Nigerian Constitution between rural and urban local governments to provide for the special needs of the rapidly growing cities.

- In addition to genuine decentralization, government at the national level must create the enabling environment to support local governments and the informal sector to operate effectively. There is a need to continuously review and update existing legislation in respect of urban planning, building standards, infrastructure and environmental regulations etc., in order to make them more realistic, attainable and compatible with local conditions. While government and planners should retain long term control to guarantee public safety and environmental health, local conditions dictate that planning should become more flexible, more advisory and promotional, and seek to mediate conflicting interests and values, rather than adhere to the traditional preoccupation with zoning, regulation and control to perverse the sanctity of public and private property, and to forceably stop slums from forming. Some adjustments and compromises have to be made to ensure enhanced security of land and housing tenure for the poor in order to give them a sufficient stake in and incentive to improve the quality of where they live and work. Informal sector settlements and activities must be decriminalized to ensure social harmony and sustainability (ILO, 1991; Tripp, 2003; Geoffrey Payne Associates). Indeed, current research suggests that slums and irregular settlements grow not only because the people who live in them are poor, but because of overregulation, the sluggishness of government to provide adequate and affordable land, and failure to harness the energies and resources of the poor in the right direction. The creation of a dual and parallel urban systems - the 'formal' and 'informal', the 'legal' and 'illegal' should give way to an appropriate mix and range of tenure systems and standards within the same city, providing scope for incremental improvement over time as resources improve.

- The indigenous knowledge movement has implications for international development assistance as well. As indicated in the opening paragraphs, the conventional model of development, which has sought to transform African societies into the Western image of what these societies ought to be has not only failed, but has tended to alienate the people from their roots and to undermine local capacity building and self confidence. (Ake, 1988) When technical assistance underrates and overlooks local knowledge and expertise, it reinforces the problems of dependency and underdevelopment instead of reinforcing and building on already existing local capacity. Aid agencies that seek to alleviate poverty must focus more clearly on decentralised cooperation that seeks to reach and assist people more directly and not always on states and governments. They should also adjust the ways they operate so that they can more effectively support and strengthen local institution that relate more closely to the needs and priorities of the intended beneficiaries. (Satterthwaite 2000; IAF 2001) The Habitat Agenda urges the international development community not only to provide new and additional financial support for the goal of "adequate shelter for all", but even more importantly, to address the structural roots of poverty in the developing world through "positive action on the issues of finance, external debt, international trade and transfer of technology". (UN-Habitat 1989)

- But the preservation of indigenous knowledge, and its application to the challenges of development depend largely on the local people in the towns and slums of developing countries themselves as the custodians and practitioners of indigenous knowledge. They must be encouraged to appreciate the strong and weak points of their knowledge and practices, and seek through experimentation to improve and modify them appropriately in the light of change and new ideas. In Nigerian cities, the informal sector operators need to organize and self-regulate themselves better in order to engage more constructively with government and other development partners; increase their power to lobby, negotiate and influence public policy in favour of their sector. They should pool resources through 'clustering' and other forms of cooperation that foster mutual support in a way to help their enterprises to grow and their settlements to improve. (Rogerson, 1996; Rakodi, 1997) Collectively they must curb some of the socially unacceptable 'coping strategies' that tend to discredit them, such as adulteration, crime, unhygienic living habits and practices, etc., and confine themselves to genuine activities

for livelihood which are 'illegal' only in the technical sense of not conforming fully with official regulations and bureaucratic norms that are often arbitrary and inequitable. (Danida, 1997; Mankhoff and Seibal, 1996)

- Marshal Sahlins has rightly emphasized the need for peoples in the developing world "to indigenize the forces of global modernity, and turn them to their own ends", since the real impact of globalization depends on the response developed at the local level. (Sahlins, in Hopper 2000; Davis and Ebbe, 1995) With the increasing tempo of globalization, Africa cannot opt for an insular and entirely home-grown approach to its development, but must follow a path of development which recognizes the merits and limitations of both local knowledge and global science, and explores the interface between the two. Like the Japanese and the rapidly developing countries of Asia, Africa must aspire to achieve an endogenous model of development which has a distinct African cultural fingerprint.

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