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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Lagos Transition: From the 'City for People' to 'City for Profit'

Oluwatobi Oladapo[1] and Victor Onifade[2]

[1, 2] Centre for Housing and Sustainable Development, University of Lagos.

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines whether the urban poor truly possess the right to the city amid urban regeneration efforts targeting the Oworonshoki waterfront communities in Lagos State, Nigeria. These efforts are part of the Kosofe Model City Plan. Oworonshoki waterfront residents, as members of the urban poor, initially supported and participated in the project. However, instead of gaining advantages, reports indicate that residents suffered forced evictions and displacement, rendering them urban Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Framed by the 'right to the city' perspective, this study argues that the Kosofe Model City Plan has exacerbated inequalities. These dynamics prevent urban IDPs from accessing safe and; affordable housing, thereby undermining the aims of Sustainable Development Goal 11. Using interviews and document records, the paper critically analyses the Oworonshoki case of eviction and displacement. Through a sequential, transformative QUAL-quan mixed-methods approach, it investigates themes of exclusion and inequality. Findings reveal that, to date, implementation of the Kosofe Model City Plan has prioritized 'City for Profit' over 'City for People'.

Corresponding author:
oluwatobi.oladapo@yahoo.com

Keywords: Kosofe model city plan, Lagos, Right to the city, Urban IDPs, Urban regeneration

1.0 Introduction

As the country's commercial and industrial hub, Lagos is a key driver of Nigeria's economic growth, with over 50% of Nigeria's industrial capacity being located in the state (LSG, 2012). Specifically, Lagos is the largest consumer market in Sub-Saharan Africa (LRO, 2019). Currently, with over 22 million residents and a projected population exceeding 32 million by 2052 (LSDP, 2022), Lagos is no doubt the most populous state in Nigeria. According to the United Nations (2018), cities with more than 10 million residents are known as megacities. The United Nations (2018) further projected that the number of megacities would rise globally from 33 in 2018 to 43 in 2030. The majority of these cities are in the Global South, with Lagos confirmed as one of them by the United Nations. In the book Lagos State Investor Handbook (2012), Babatunde Raji Fashola, a former Governor of Lagos State, announced the government's vision to make Lagos Africa's Model Megacity, and in 2013, through a promotional video titled – 'Lagos, Africa's Big Apple' –, he further outlines the government's plans to transform the state into a Model Megacity of the 21st century. Lagos megacity initiatives focus on transforming the city into a globally competitive hub through various infrastructural, social, and economic development projects. This was documented in the Lagos State Development Plan 2012-2052.

In many Low-and middle-income countries, the most common framework of governance is one in which the provision of basic needs for citizens' welfare is not as paramount as generating large financial capital by the government (Purcell, 2006). It is this framework of governance that stands as a driving force for many governments to pursue urban regeneration policies in emerging cities in the Global South (Fields, 2017; Olatunde et al, 2021). Supporting this assertion, Lawanson and Omoegun (2018) note that the implementation of megacity projects in Africa is based on this framework. In view of this, this study examines whether the urban poor own the right to Lagos city, where the state government plans to transform Lagos into an 'African Model Megacity and a global hub that will be comparable to Dubai by 2052' (World Bank, 2022; African Cities Research Consortium, 2025). The Lagos megacity project has created a tension between the government's intention to generate colossal revenue and the fundamental human rights of the urban poor. In 2024, the state raised ₦1.3 trillion in internally generated revenue (IGR), which amounted to over 35% of Nigeria's total IGR. The heavy burden of this IGR fell mainly on the urban poor, who were forced to pay multiple taxes to finance the various megacity projects, from which they ultimately failed to benefit owing to their strategic exclusion by the government (Bakare, 2024). This exclusion led to revanchist urbanism, where the urban poor who lived in slums and informal settlements were viewed as criminals and hindrances to the megacity projects rather than as stakeholders (Olajide & Lawanson, 2025; Nwanna, 2018). Among the outcomes of revanchist urbanism in Lagos State are forced evictions and displacements of the urban poor from slums and informal settlements.

2.0 Forced Evictions and Displacements among the Urban Poor

Although the Lagos State government has recorded substantial achievements in the megacity projects, especially in the areas of infrastructural developments, transport system reforms, and digital governance innovations, challenges such as forced eviction and displacement, environmental sustainability and flooding, traffic congestion, housing crisis and slum proliferation continue to plague the Lagos State megacity initiative. This study focuses on cases of forced eviction and displacement in Oworonshoki waterfront communities, leading to the emergence of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). In 2020, 82.4 million people were forcibly displaced globally. Out of this figure, 25.9 million crossed international borders and lived as refugees, while 41.4 million remained within their internal borders, living as IDPs (UNHCR, 2021). The United Nations (1998) defines IDPs as:

> Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or place of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.

Accordingly, victims of forced eviction and displacement in Oworonshoki waterfront communities are described as IDPs. Some of the extant literature has examined IDPs living in humanitarian camps (Ferris & Stark, 2012). According to Liman and Ladan (2021), however, little or no attention has been paid to IDPs who migrated to and settled in urban areas. In the literature, two terms have emerged for describing such IDPs. First, scholars like Fielden (2008), Cantor (2020), Roberts (2022) and Roberts and Lawanson (2023) use the term 'urban IDPs' to describe them. This classification is based on the geographic destination of the IDPs. Second, authors like Polzer and Moretti (2010), Liman and Ladan (2021) and Etzold (2024) prefer the term 'mobile IDPs' for describing the same phenomenon, with this categorization being based on the nature of the IDPs' movement. Throughout this study, the term urban IDPs is adopted.

Two of every three of the world's IDPs are urban IDPs (UNHCR, 2021; UNHCR, 2020), and as of the end of 2024, about four million IDPs lived in Nigeria, excluding urban IDPs (UNHCR, 2025). Roberts (2022) argues that the term urban IDPs fails to differentiate IDPs who move to and live in cities from the indigenous urban poor who become IDPs within the cities. This argument is very important because a vivid clarification between the two groups will better inform urban planning and contribute greatly to the discourse on how both groups can be

supported by government policies and humanitarian interventions. This shows that previous studies have not classified urban IDPs. As a result, this study groups urban IDPs into migrant urban IDPs and non-migrant urban IDPs. Migrant urban IDPs are IDPs who are not living in any humanitarian camp but have relocated from their indigenous states to new cities in other states. Meanwhile, non-migrant urban IDPs are IDPs who were displaced in their indigenous states and thereafter lived outside humanitarian camps in the cities, within their indigenous states. To be specific, this study seeks to determine whether non-migrant urban IDPs own the right to the city in the urban regeneration initiative for Oworonshoki waterfront communities in Lagos State, Nigeria.

The modern landscape of urban regeneration in the Global South is defined by the impact of the Model Megacity Project on the lived experience of non-migrant urban IDPs. At present, cities across Africa - and the wider Global South are working hard to reposition themselves within the global economic ladder, yet the issues of forced evictions and displacements experienced by non-migrant urban IDPs have gradually moved from an occasional tool of colonial control to a systemic mechanism of neoliberal urban regeneration policy (Aderoju, 2021; Iweka & Adebayo, 2015). This problem is linked to the global adoption of neoliberal political-economic principles. Neoliberalism encourages states to focus on transforming the city into a globally competitive hub, mainly for capital accumulation from private investors. It involves the implementation of policy deregulation, enforcement of private property rights, and attraction of foreign direct investment (Mbinza, 2025; Iweka & Adebayo, 2015). For example, the branding of Johannesburg in South Africa by the government as a world-class African city represents a top-down process driven by private investors that ignores the plight of non-migrant urban IDPs (Mbinza, 2025). Similarly, in Nigeria, the government's aim to transform the city of Lagos into a Model Megacity has led to forced evictions and displacements of non-migrant urban IDPs. This has happened because the government seems to view non-migrant urban IDPs as roadblocks to progress (Aderoju, 2021; Iweka & Adebayo, 2015) or as filth that threatens the city's global appeal (Badiora, 2017).

Historically, the persistent use of planning laws of colonial origin to implement urban regeneration policy by African countries has been the major driver of forced evictions and displacements experienced by non-migrant urban IDPs. These laws labelled slums and informal settlements as sites of crime and congestion, giving the post-colonial leaders justification to enforce forced evictions and displacements as normal solutions to urban regeneration problems (Ocheje, 2007). For instance, the 1978 Land Use Act in Nigeria grants state governments absolute power to own all lands and revoke any land rights for public interest. Research on forced evictions and displacements shows that the government hides behind the narrative of public interest to revoke the citizens' land rights. Governments always justify forced evictions and displacements as necessary for infrastructural development, environmental safety and security improvement; however, these justifications are contested as myths (Ocheje, 2007). The incidents of forced evictions and displacements in Lagos also show a consistent pattern of state-led violence against non-migrant urban IDPs, not because they are criminals but only to make lands available by all means for the elite (Aderoju, 2021; Amnesty International, 2017a). Comparative research notes that the challenges faced in Lagos are mirrored across other Global South megacities, where urban governance often prioritizes international visibility over local inclusivity (Adeniyi-Ogunyankin, 2022; Ajibade, 2017; Watson, 2014).

It has been reported that 300,000 urban poor were displaced in Maroko, Lagos, Nigeria, during the 1990 urban beautification exercise (Agbola & Jinadu, 1997). In Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, preparations for the 2016 Olympics resulted in the evictions of over 22,000 families (Williamson, 2017). Similarly, the 2005 evictions, known as Operation Murambatsvina (clear the filth) in Zimbabwe resulted in the demolition of over 92,000 houses and the displacement of 700,000 people (Iweka & Adebayo, 2015). Many studies have explored the issues of Lagos forced evictions and displacements, where the government used claims about public safety and environmental protection as justifications for transferring lands to private developers (African Cities Research Consortium, 2025; Olajide & Lawanson, 2025; Olatunde et al.,

2021; Albert, 2018; Lawanson & Omoegun, 2018; Nwanna, 2018; Amnesty International, 2017a). However, there has been no investigation of non-migrant urban IDPs' right to the city of Lagos. Thus, this study fills the gap by exploring non-migrant urban IDPs' right to the city of Lagos, specifically in the light of the urban regeneration initiative for Oworonshoki waterfront communities.

Urban citizenship around the world, particularly in the Nigerian context, entails the right of residents to participate in the political, social, and economic life of the city, regardless of their formal land tenure status (Adewoyin & Adelakun, 2026; Lawanson, 2022), while spatial justice is the equitable distribution of urban resources and the right of residents to occupy and inhabit the urban space (Omoegun, 2025; Lawanson, Oyalowo & Nubi, 2021). Significantly, housing security acts as the guarantee of stability, ensuring that the act of inhabitation is protected from arbitrary state intervention or market-driven displacement (Oyalowo, 2024; Badiora, 2020). The relationship among urban citizenship rights, spatial justice, and housing security in Nigeria is an important factor that determines who is recognized as a legitimate inhabitant of the city and who is not (Omoegun, 2025; Lawanson, 2022). Since the announcement of Lagos' megacity initiatives in 2012, many forced evictions and displacements without reasonable compensation have been witnessed. Some of these incidents were recorded at Badia-East in 2013, Otodo Gbame in 2017, Tarkwa Bay in 2020, and Oworonshoki in 2023, just to mention a few (Olajide & Lawanson, 2025; Yomi, 2020; Onwuanyi, 2018).

Forced evictions and displacements lead to the destruction of victims' fixed capital and housing investments, loss of social and safety networks, family disintegration, and sudden development of psychological trauma. Moreover, forced evictions and displacements aggravate poverty by pulling people out of their means of livelihood and hindering access to education and healthcare (Badiora, 2017; Iweka & Adebayo, 2015). From a human rights perspective, forced evictions and displacements are violations of national and international human rights and treaties such as the right to adequate housing and other related human rights (Roberts, 2022). Forced evictions and displacements not only violate the right to housing but also hinder access to water, sanitation, food, and work (Amnesty International, 2017b). The ongoing state-created homelessness through forced evictions and displacements in Lagos State undermines the achievement of inclusive, safe, and resilient cities in line with Sustainable Development Goal 11 (Ibeh, 2026; Aderoju, 2021). This study therefore draws on cases of forced evictions and displacements in Oworonshoki waterfront communities in 2023, seeking to investigate their implications for the right to the city among non-migrant urban IDPs.

According to the Lagos State government, residential clusters in the state account for 27% of total land use amidst a shortage of formal housing, with 75% of the population living in informal settlements (LSDP, 2022). These housing shortages of approximately 3.3 million units drive the development of informal settlements with over 140 slums identified across the city of Lagos (LSDP, 2022; World Bank, 2022). Thus, it is clear that informal settlements are the result of housing shortages. Given this scenario, it is logical to ask questions about who is responsible for forced evictions and displacements of non-migrant urban IDPs in Lagos. Moreover, in the context of an inclusive urban regeneration policy where the government promotes transformations that not only have sustainable impacts on the economic and financial priorities of the state but also positively improve the lives of the people, do non-migrant urban IDPs own the right to the city?

Specifically, therefore, this paper contributes to emerging research on inclusive urbanism and sustainable urbanization by asking the following questions: How does the Kosofe Model City Plan shape the right to urban citizenship in Lagos? In what ways does the Kosofe Model City Plan reinforce or challenge the new forms of evictions and displacements experienced by non-migrant urban IDPs in Lagos? For clarification, the study measures 'ownership' of urban rights using the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria as amended, the 2006 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the 1996 United Nations' position on forced evictions and displacements, and the concept of the right to the city by Henri Lefebvre (1968).

3.0 Theoretical Framework for the Study

This work is informed by the concept of – 'Right to the City' – as proposed by Henri Lefebvre (1968). Lefebvre states that residents should collectively shape their urban environment. This notion is linked to urban citizenship, spatial justice, and housing security, in which emphasis is placed on equitable rights to participation, even distribution of urban resources, and adequate protection of all urban residents from arbitrary evictions and displacements (Lefebvre, 1991). Lefebvre argued that, under capitalist state management, urban spaces are alienated from the urban poor who use it because the urban space is conceived by stakeholders whose primary goal is the reproduction of capital and the revocation of public space at the expense of the urban poor. The Right to the City is the right of all residents, irrespective of their status, to participate in the production and management of urban spaces.

The Right to the City framework posits that urban spaces are collective product emerging from the labour, culture, and survival of those who inhabit it (Lefebvre, 1968). However, the reality of this right in the Lagos megacity project undermines the principles of inclusiveness in terms of urban citizenship, spatial justice, and housing security (Aderoju, 2021). Lefebvre's theory has been expanded by David Harvey and Mark Purcell. Harvey (2003, 2005) frames the Right to the City as a collective class right, arguing that urbanization is a primary mechanism through which capitalism absorbs its surplus urban spaces. According to him, the government uses urban regeneration policy to accumulate more capital from surplus urban spaces recovered from evicting and displacing the urban poor from city centres. Describing this practice as 'accumulation by dispossession', – Harvey concludes that the Right to the City is the government's right to control the urban regeneration process and reclaim surplus urban spaces. For Purcell (2002), the Right to the City is about the politics of living in an urban area. He further notes that the Right to the City is not granted by national citizenship but by the act of occupying an urban space. Finally, Purcell warns that the fight for liberation among the local residents of an urban space may reinscribe new forms of domination when there is segregation or discrimination among them.

4.0 Methods

The study mines its data from interviews (semi-structured) and documents to critically explore citizens' rights to the city of Lagos. Respondents were selected using a purposive sampling technique. Regarding demographic characteristics, respondents were basically the eviction victims, government officials, and the media officers who witnessed the evictions and displacements. Evidence was drawn from interviews of 32 non-migrant urban IDPs and 12 officials of government agencies- (4 each from the Lagos State Urban Renewal Agency, the Lagos State Building Control Agency, and the Lagos Resilience Office). Six (6) media officers were selected – (2 each from *The Guardian*, *The PUNCH*, and *The Daily Trust*). Altogether, 50 respondents were interviewed. Other sources of data collection included government policy documents such as Lagos State Development Plan 2022–2052; Lagos State Development Plan 2012–2025; The Lagos Mainland Central Model City Plan/Kosofe Model City Plan (LSG, 2012); Lagos State Investor Handbook 2012; national newspapers such as *The Guardian*, *The PUNCH* and *The Daily Trust*; published interviews of non-migrant urban IDPs and peer-reviewed academic publications. The data from the physical interviews was used to counterbalance the potential biases and incomplete information in the data collected from the newspapers.

The selected newspapers were chosen because they engaged in wider coverage and publication of the evictions and displacements. This approach enables the study to access diverse perspectives and contextual information that may not be easily obtainable through direct fieldwork alone. The adoption of this method of data collection is due to the nature of the research topic and the practical realities of the study context. For instance, examining complex issues such as citizens' rights to the city, and forced evictions and displacements requires critical engagement with existing policy frameworks, media representations, and academic discourse, all of which capture different opinions and historical developments that cannot be replicated through only direct interviews. To identify the recurring themes of exclusion and inequality, policy implications, and gaps in urban

inclusion practices, all documents were systematically reviewed and analyzed.

The choice of the selected documents was based on the discussions of the Kosofe Model City Plan, the Lagos' Megacity Initiative and the cases of forced evictions and displacements in Oworonshoki waterfront communities in 2023. The selection of the 2023 Oworonshoki forced evictions and displacements was due to the government's claim of a policy shift from public safety and environmental protection justifications to the policy of pulling back the developments on the Island towards the Mainland. Called the T.H.E.M.E.S. Plus agenda – it focuses on the Blue Economy. The T.H.E.M.E.S. Plus agenda is a ₦7 billion jetty and luxury housing scheme designed to pull back Island-level development toward Oworonshoki. In addition, the study selected the 2023 Oworonshoki forced evictions and displacements because the scale of displacements, involving the destruction of schools and clinics, aligns with the 2024 African Union theme of reparations and spatial justice. Also, this case was selected because it represented judicial defiance by the Lagos State government agency. Despite an interim injunction granted on October 23, 2025, restraining the Lagos State Building Control Agency, the state proceeded with overnight demolitions. This administrative disregard for court orders illustrates how elite economic interests override communal land tenure.

The study follows the established best practices for rigorous selection of documents, source triangulation, and systematic thematic analysis as postulated by Bowen (2009) to ensure that generated information is credible, contextually grounded, and perfectly aligned with the aim of the research. The systematic thematic analysis process was built on line-by-line thematic coding, where every sentence of the transcripts was scrutinized for emergent patterns. Themes were generated by looking across the codes of all the transcripts to identify shared concepts. Themes of 'exclusion and inequality' were developed by examining concepts of 'judicial defiance and spatial justice', 'forced eviction and illegal displacement', as well as 'harassment and humiliation'. Thereafter, data analysis was supported using the Taguette discourse analysis software tool. The study used a sequential transformative QUAL-quan mixed-methods design (Creswell, 2009) with two distinct data collection phases, where data collected from documents was followed by the collection of data from interviews. The data collected was viewed through the theoretical lens of the right to the city (Lefebvre, 1968), mainly exploring equitable rights to participation, even distribution of urban resources, and adequate protection of all urban residents from arbitrary evictions and displacements.

5.0 Oworonshoki Model City Initiative, Eviction and Displacement

The Oworonshoki waterfront model city initiative was included in the Kosofe Model City Plan (LSG, 2012). This model city plan is part of the Lagos megacity project. The residents of Oworonshoki waterfront communities had embraced the initiative warmly and participated actively in the Kosofe Model City Plan. The key initiatives of this plan were based on a combination of urban regeneration and smart technology projects, which were to address the threats posed by traditional urban governance, the rapid increase in population, vehicular traffic congestion, flooding, and insecurity, among other issues. Oworonshoki waterfront communities are 'strategically located at the foot of the Third Mainland Bridge, which connects the mainland and Lagos Island' (Olajide & Lawanson, 2025).

These communities comprise Odun-Ifa, Lone Street, Idi-Araba, Oke-Eri, Oluwaseyi, Cornerstone, Ogo-Oluwa, Precious Seeds, and Coker (Olajide & Lawanson, 2025; Ogune, 2025). Given their strategic location, the Oworonshoki waterfront communities were incorporated in the overall megacity initiatives with the aim of transforming the blighted areas of the Oworonshoki waterfront into one of the biggest transportation, tourism and entertainment hubs in Nigeria. It was hoped that the vehicular traffic gridlocks on Lagos Island would be reduced and carbon emission levels would be minimized. In the same vein, flooding would be checked and illegal dredging activities in the area would be curtailed to combat the effects of climate change. Consequently, insecurity within the waterfront communities would be eradicated using smart technologies (Editorial Board of *The Guardian*, 2023**;** Oyewole, 2017).

To achieve these objectives, the Lagos State government collaborated with residents of the area in the preparation of the government-led Kosofe Model City Plan (LSG, 2012) between 2020 and 2022. Oworonshoki waterfront communities joined forces with project consultants to prepare an inclusive structure plan designed to catalyze local economic development by leveraging the community's unique comparative advantages (Olajide & Lawanson, 2025). However, the relationship and cooperation between these two parties collapsed when the Lagos State government, on July 27, 2023, demolished buildings in Oworonshoki waterfront communities (Olonіniran, 2024), bulldozing about 1,000 houses rendering over 10,000 residents homeless. The aftermath of the forced evictions and displacements resulted in 22 deaths, including children, women, and men. The causes of these deaths included shock, hypertension and other related diseases (Ogune, 2025).

The Lagos State government through the Public Relations Officer of the Lagos State Task Force, Mr. Abdulraheem Gbadeyan, stated publicly that the forced evictions and displacements had been motivated by security concerns (*The Guardian* Editorial, 2023), noting that Sections 14(2) (b) and 20(2) (b) of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria as amended, empowered government to guarantee security. Additionally, it was also noted that the 1978 Land Use Act vests ownership of all lands across the federation in the government. Therefore, Mr. Gbadeyan asserted, the Lagos State government was duly empowered to revoke the Certificate of Occupancy on any land in the overriding interest of public safety.

6.0 Findings

All over the state, the government has implemented large infrastructural developments with few smart-technology innovations in its planned megacity initiative. Among the projects are Africa's Silicon Valley (Yabacon), digital fintech solutions, smart railway transportation, smart transport apps, e-ticketing, automating land registries, smart land-use billing systems, and the smart Eko Atlantic city project. Turning Oworonshoki waterfront communities into a green infrastructure, in the bid to mitigate natural hazards, control water balance, and alleviate heat stress, could potentially improve climate resilience on the part of Lagos city and its citizens. However, achievement of this goal was jeopardized the forced eviction and displacement of residents. As such, the area has yet to see the proposed smart-waste management, zero-carbon emission, smart lighting and smart citizen feedback on urban planning, leaving the area exposed to diverse security risks. Considering the theoretical lens of the right to the city (Lefebvre, 1968), the Lagos State government has neither evenly distributed urban resources nor provided adequate protection for non-migrant urban IDPs.

Although Lefebvre projects the city as a collective asset that must be accessible and shaped by all urban residents, the actual implementation of the Kosofe Model City Plan has created inequalities among city dwellers, with non-migrant urban IDPs experiencing forced evictions and displacements without reasonable compensation. This situation prevents non-migrant urban IDPs from exercising their urban citizenship rights to safe and affordable housing, quality healthcare, standard education and inclusive participation in urban governance, among other targets of Sustainable Development Goal 11. The Kosofe Model City Plan is part of the Lagos State government's mission to make Lagos Africa's model megacity and global economic and financial hub. The government appears to be committed to overhauling the city's infrastructure and attracting foreign direct investments without considering the needs of the urban poor populations (Watson, 2014). Interestingly, while the state government desire to have Lagos ranked as Africa's model megacity, it appears that many citizens have yet to see a city that works for all (Lawanson, 2018).

According to a coalition of non-governmental organizations, in the build-up to the Oworonshoki demolitions, the Lagos State Ministry of Environment had on July 18, 2023 issued an enforcement notice in which it accused the communities of disobeying the Environmental Management and Protection Law 2017 – acts contributing to flooding and other environmental degradation along the riverbank (Editorial Board of *The Guardian*, 2023). However, residents affirmed that only two streets actually received the notice, even though over 7,000 homes and structures spread across several streets and communities were eventually demolished (Gbonegun, 2023). In

defence of the government, Mr. Abdulraheem Gbadeyan accused the communities of harbouring criminal elements who frequently robbed commuters on the Third Mainland Bridge (Editorial Board of The Guardian, 2023). However, the legality and fairness of government's actions have been challenged by a coalition comprising Fabulous Urban Nigeria Foundation, Rethinking Cities, Shantytown Empowerment Foundation, CEE-Hope, Oworo Youth Forum, Lot5 Charity Foundation, Lagos Urban Development Initiative and Heinrich Boll Stiftung. Citing the case of the communities in Precious Seeds, the coalition faulted claims that the areas are on wetland or that they lack sanitary facilities (Gbonegun, 2023; Olajide & Lawanson, 2025).

In the notice of July 18, 2023, the Lagos State government had threatened prosecution after seven days of non-compliance with ministry directives but had not stated that residents' properties would be demolished. Yet, the demolitions were undertaken by the Lagos State Building Control Agency, an agency that had not been in communication with the communities. After the demolitions, the Oworonshoki waterfront communities, under the aegis of the Nigerian Slum/Informal Settlement Federation, went to court and won against the state government (Olajide & Lawanson, 2025), leading to an interim injunction from a Lagos State High Court on October 23, 2025 that restrained the state government, the Attorney General and the Lagos State Building Control Agency from proceeding with further structural removals. This was just three days before the most violent phase of the demolitions.

Previously, a landmark victory had been achieved in June 2017, when the Lagos State High Court ruled that forced evictions of waterfront communities without adequate notice or resettlement were cruel, inhuman and degrading, violating Section 34 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution as amended (Justice & Empowerment Initiative, 2017; Amnesty International, 2017b). Similarly, in August 2025, Justice F.N. Ogazi awarded ₦3.5 billion in damages against the Lagos State government for previous unlawful demolitions in Makoko and Iwaya, citing the continuous threat and fear of imminent demolition (Ibeh, 2026). These rulings affirm that forced evictions without proper consultation and compensation violate the fundamental right to dignity (Ibeh, 2026; Amnesty International, 2017b). Unfortunately, the Lagos State government disregarded the court judgments, as it had also done in the cases won by Badia-East and Otodo Gbame communities concerning forced eviction and displacements in 2013 and 2017 respectively. As Olajide and Lawanson (2022) observe with regard to the attitude of the Lagos State government, the "right to the city struggles are directly linked to neoliberal urban restructuring and its development paradoxes, which disproportionately affect the urban poor."

While the government may take possession of any property that is in a dangerous state or is injurious to the health of humans, plants or animals (Section (44) (2) (f) of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria as amended), Nigerians have the right to acquire and own immovable property anywhere in the country. As such, the government cannot compulsorily take possession of any movable property without providing adequate compensation and complying with all other requirements of the law. Thus, even if the demolitions in the Oworonshoki waterfront communities are logical, legal and morally justifiable, the government must protect displaced citizens and provide alternative shelters for them in these circumstances. Clearly, therefore, these actions contravene the United Nations' (1996) position on forced evictions and displacements, which stipulates that where national governments fail to provide accessible, affordable and safe housing for their citizens, the government cannot claim that the removal of illegal settlements is consistent with international law. Indeed, while urban regeneration aspirations may be noble, development aspirations ought to accommodate the livelihood realities of the majority (Kamete, 2013).

Moreover, non-migrant urban IDPs are protected by the 2006 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Under these rights, non-migrant urban IDPs in Lagos have the right to restitution of lands, territories and resources that they traditionally owned or used. In case such lands, territories and resources are forcefully taken or damaged, the owners have a right to compensation, which may come in different forms. It is also the constitutional right of citizens to participate in the decision-making process since they are on the

receiving end. Article 18 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2008) states that indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters that affect their rights. Thus, by failing to compensate non-migrant urban IDPs in Lagos and refusing to properly engage with them, the Lagos State government is in breach of the 2006 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Furthermore, government has an obligation to cater to the welfare as well as the economic and social interests of the people. To protect these rights, Section 17(2) (c) (d) of the 1999 Constitution, as amended, provides that governmental actions shall be humane and the sanctity of the human person shall be recognized; it also states human dignity must be maintained and enhanced by the government. Thus, ostensibly acting to curb the inhumane action of the executive arm, the Lagos State House of Assembly ordered the Task Force to stop further demolition of houses in the local government area with immediate effect (Editorial Board of *The Guardian*, 2023). It is equally noteworthy that Article 8, Sections 2(b) (c) of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2008) states that States shall provide effective mechanisms for prevention of, and redress for: (b) Any action which has the aim or effect of dispossessing the indigenous peoples of their lands, territories or resources; and, (c) Any form of forced population transfer which has the aim or effect of violating or undermining any of their rights.

To buttress this, Article 10 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2008) confirms that indigenous peoples shall not be forcefully removed from their lands or territories, and no relocation shall take place without the free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned and after agreement on just and fair compensation and, where possible, with the option of return. Regrettably, the Lagos State government had totally disregarded these provisions in evicting and displacing residents of the affected communities. Although the Lagos State government exercised its legal right in the case of Oworonshoki forced evictions and displacements, the residents were not allowed to exercise their own legal rights**.** Therefore, this action by the Lagos State government contradicts the real notion of sustainable urban development. In a truly inclusive urban system, sustainable urban development is the process of synergistic integration among the subsystems making up a city, which guarantees the local population a non-decreasing level of well-being in the long term (Camagni, 1998).

7.0 Conclusion and recommendations

According to the Lagos State government, the ₦7 billion Blue Economy Oworonshoki Megacity Project is designed to attract new investors. This is in line with Watson (2014), who states that attracting investment seems to be a promising strategy and has become a mainstream 'recipe' in many African city regions to trigger urban development. Considering the consequences of the Lagos State government's motive, UN-Habitat (2013) warns that promoting economic prosperity through such an entrepreneurial view of the city often happens at the expense of the habitat and livelihoods of the poor. Three respondents testified to this as follows:

> **Respondent 1:** We were deceived by the Lagos State government, which promised that none of our houses would be demolished. Can you see what the government has done now? All our properties are gone. I can never trust this government again. How am I going to survive with my family? Who will come to our aid?
>
> **Respondent 2:** Those who are doing construction work over there informed us that the Lagos State government has sold our land to their boss. They said that our land was sold to their boss at the rate of 100,000,000 naira per plot, depending on the number of plots they bought. This is daylight robbery. We have lost everything to the government.
>
> **Respondent 3:** The government has demolished our house and sold it to the big men and developers. My children can no longer go to school, my youngest is sick now, and our small hospital has been pulled down. I cannot find my phone to call my husband, who travelled some weeks ago. I am doomed!

In the light of insights from the interviews and other findings from the study, it may be concluded that neoliberalism has created a paradigm shift from

people-driven to market-driven urban development approaches, with the transition from the 'City for People' to 'City for Profit' mindset (Brenner et al., 2012). Eko Atlantic City is a good example of a city-for-profit model where private capital accumulation was prioritized over equitable urban resilience (Ajibade, 2017). In Lagos the 'cult of urban entrepreneurialism' encourages the state government to seek to maximize the 'exchange value' of its land while neglecting its 'use value' for the urban poor (Adeniyi-Ogunyankin, 2022). Clearly, the Lagos megacity initiative is undergirded by a 'City for Profit' rather than a 'City for People' mentality. Regarding the Kosofe Model City Plan, non-migrant urban IDPs were denied their right to urban citizenship despite the extant laws. Academically, therefore, this study contributes to the debate on 'urban IDPs' by identifying migrant and non-migrant urban IDPs. More importantly, the work has advanced the theoretical debate on the right to the city by establishing how the government's fixation on revenue generation prevents non-migrant urban IDPs from fully exercising their legal rights to curb incessant forced evictions and displacements in Lagos.

In the city of Lagos, forced evictions and displacements may be characterized as a conflict among three contending ideas or entities: the green city, the growing city and the just city. For resolving this conflict, Campbell's (2016) planner's triangle remains a foundational framework. Using this framework requires flexibility and data-driven planning that will manage the conflicts successfully to the advantage of future generations (Brinkley & Wagner, 2024). In this instance, the total demolition and clearance model used by the Lagos State government should be replaced by a slum upgrade model, which is recognized as a more effective and humane method for mitigating the problems faced by non-migrant urban IDPs (Iweka & Adebayo, 2015). The international consensus favours in-situ slum upgrading because it improves the physical environment while keeping the community intact (Schoonman & Conteh, 2025; Iweka & Adebayo, 2015).

Financially, in-situ upgrading is found to be one-third less expensive per household than evictions and displacements (Gertler et al., 2025). The Lagos State government can learn from successful slum upgrading programmes, such as the one in Mukuru, Nairobi, Kenya, where participatory planning and community mapping guided large-scale slum upgrading without forced evictions and displacements; the PUI model in Medellín, Colombia, and Thailand's Baan Mankong programme, where community participation and social equity were the backbones of their slum upgrading programmes (Schoonman & Conteh, 2025). While the sociopolitical and institutional contexts of Kenya, Colombia and Thailand may not be comparable to Nigeria's, the government of the day can take its cue from the Ilasan Redevelopment urban regeneration project, which a previous government had undertaken without forced evictions or displacements (Nubi, 2026).

No doubt, forced evictions and demolitions reflect a deeper crisis of governance, justice and inclusion. The experiences of non-migrant urban IDPs from informal settlements such as Badia-East, Otodo Gbame, Tarkwa Bay, and Oworonshoki expose a troubling paradox in Nigeria's urban development trajectory, where modernizing the city's space comes at the cost of the lives, livelihoods and dignity of the most vulnerable urban poor. In this dynamic, negotiation emerges not only as a resolution but also as a democratic practice that can restore voice, rights and life to non-migrant urban IDPs. Negotiation, as used in the Urban Action Forum, where stakeholders from academia, government, slum communities, industry experts, civil societies, media practitioners, international organizations and NGOs came together to proffer solutions to the issues of forced evictions and displacements in Lagos State (Nubi, 2026), will lead to more sustainable and equitable outcomes. Negotiation offers a peaceful atmosphere of coexistence through which all urban actors can co-create solutions. This is necessary because planning and implementation of urban regeneration policy should be a co-creation among all stakeholders. Negotiation should replace authoritarian urbanism in Lagos and it must not be viewed as a courtesy or afterthought but as a fundamental pillar of democratic urban governance. In this wise, Lagos will become a truly inclusive megacity where developments are not imposed but negotiated and where non-migrant urban IDPs are actively represented and participate in urban regeneration planning and implementation.

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